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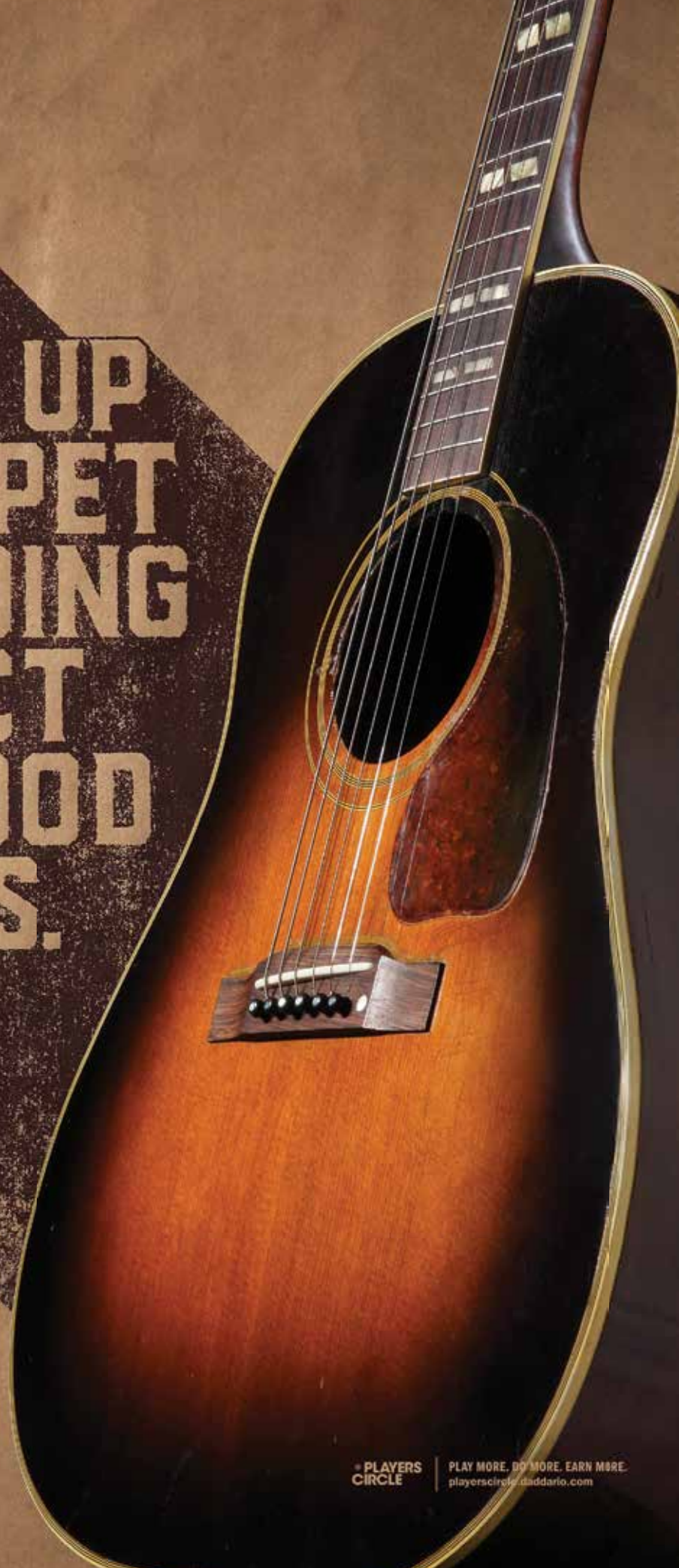
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'The acoustic guitar is believed to be the first instrument heard in Cuba, following conch shells.'

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The Creek Rocks

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Video Exclusives



DAN STUART & THOMAS HEYMAN

The veterans of the paisley underground perform 'Keep the River on Your Right' (learn to play on p. 66)



TOM BROUSSEAU

Brousseau discusses his trilogy,
North Dakota Impressions



LARRY CAMPBELL & TERESA WILLIAMS

Watch the couple play songs
from their recent self-titled LP



WALTER SALAS-HUMARA

The Silos founder explores the
dusty roads of alternative rock

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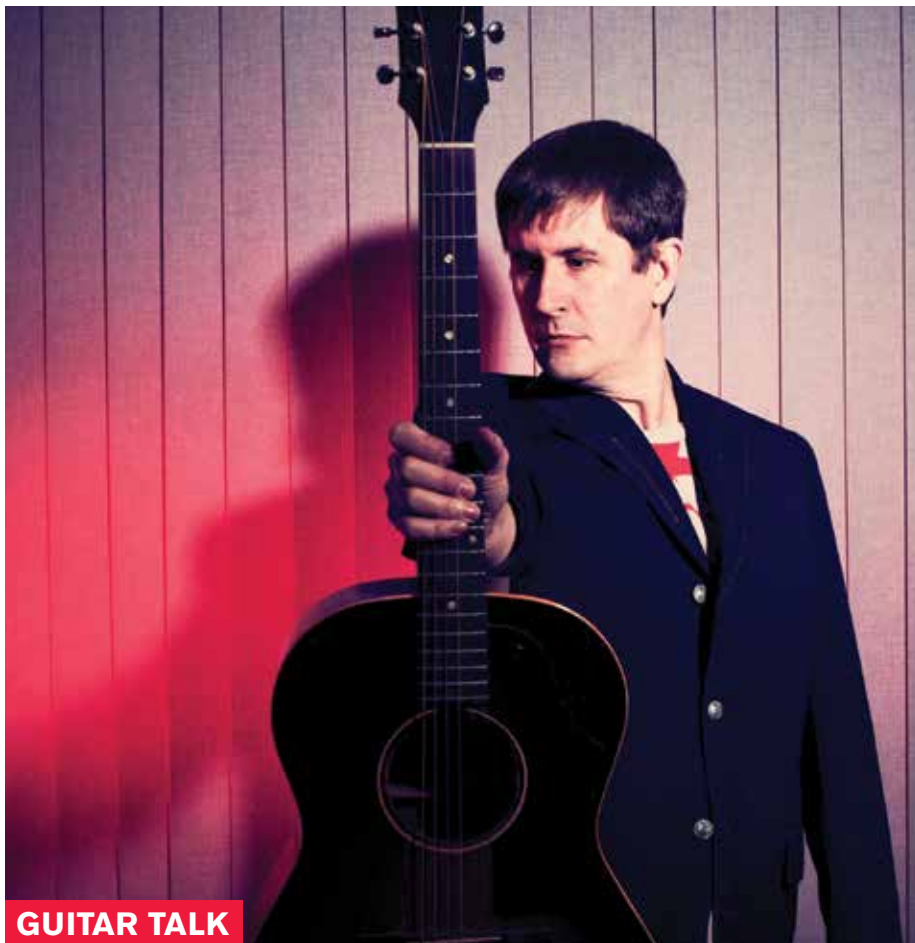
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DL ANDERSON

Hard vs. Soft

Indie rocker John Darnielle took a while to warm up to acoustic guitar

BY PAT MORAN

There's a scene in *Animal House* where a sensitive singer-songwriter strums an acoustic guitar. John Belushi swaggers by, snaps up the guitar, and smashes it to bits.

"That's the guy I didn't want to be," John Darnielle says with a chuckle, "[the guitarist] imposing his music on people."

As guitarist, songwriter, and sole member of the veteran indie band the Mountain Goats, Darnielle has never forced his vision on listeners. Instead, he embraces the redemptive power of often-derided "junk culture"—professional wrestling receives a sympathetic treatment on the Mountain Goats' 2015 album, *Beat the Champ*, and darkly romantic death rockers get some love on the band's latest, *Goths* (Merge Records).

Darnielle overcame his initial aversion to

acoustic guitars in the 1990s. Ever since his earliest recordings, the Mountain Goats' sound has been defined by Darnielle's propulsive, furiously strummed acoustic guitar. *Goths* is a departure, because Darnielle mostly swaps his acoustic to play piano, but you should still expect to hear a lot of guitar at his shows across the USA and in select European cities in 2017. In between touring, Darnielle shares how his approach to acoustic guitar has evolved over time.

Growing up, you didn't want to be a confessional singer-songwriter. How did you come around to strumming an acoustic guitar?

I had a predilection for hard-rocking stuff, and acoustic guitars felt soft. As you grow,

you realize that those categories are meaningless. Music is a much bigger conversation than hard vs. soft.

I had a good job, and there was a guitar store four blocks away. I saw an old Hawaiian guitar up on the wall. I had \$70 to spare, so I bought it. After a week alone in a room with it, all my preconceptions about acoustic guitar fell away. With a Hawaiian guitar and a steel slide, you can make a lot of noise. I realized that an acoustic guitar is whatever you want to make of it.

'With a Hawaiian guitar and a steel slide, you can make a lot of noise. I realized that an acoustic guitar is whatever you want to make of it'

What guitars will you be playing on tour?

I play a Larrivée right now. My soundman says it's the perfect guitar for me, but I'm always curious about trying new stuff. Now I have a new Ovation Legend Plus, which is a gorgeous guitar. I've already written a song on it, so that's a good sign. I can be an artistic player on it, but I can also hammer out rock 'n' roll tunes. It's pretty flexible.

The Larrivée is amazing, but it weighs a ton. [Onstage] I'm not sitting in a chair. I'm running back and forth, and jumping up and down. The lighter the guitar, the freer I am to be in my body. So I'm excited about the Ovation.

Can you tell me about writing the *Goths*' track 'Andrew Eldritch Is Moving Back to Leeds'?

After wanting one for ages, I finally got a Guild, and it became the home guitar—for playing bedtime songs to my older son. I took it with me on vacation. Late one night, I looked in a notebook and saw a title, "Andrew Eldritch Is Moving Back to Leeds." I started playing this Johnny Cash figure in E. I wrote a verse and the chorus, and then I put it away. When I came back to it, I was sitting at the keyboard, so that's how the song went from guitar to piano. It had some moves that I can't do on guitar. So I thought, "Maybe I'll write the rest of the album on piano."

Recently, I've been taking my writing experience on piano and applying it to my guitar playing. I wrote a song with a hard modulation on guitar. I've been a limited acoustic player, so I'm enjoying learning how to modulate. I'm taking information from one instrument to another.

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Janis Ian



LLOYD BAGGS

Janis Ian, Jeff Tweedy, and More to Headline Elnora Guitar Fest

The biennial event showcases a wide variety of acoustic guitarists

BY BLAIR JACKSON

The biennial **Elnora Guitar Festival**, held at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts on the University of Illinois' Urbana-Champaign campus September 14–16, is shaping up as an important showcase for a wide variety of acoustic guitarists (and mandolinists, and other instrumentalists) from around the world.

Once known as the Wall to Wall Guitar Festival, Elnora—now named for one of the founders of the Krannert Center, Elnora Krannert—is in its seventh year and boasts a lineup of esteemed musicians performing at 14 ticketed concerts and at least seven free shows. In addition, the Guitar Gallery in the lobby will feature more than 80 guitar-shaped art pieces.

The 2017 artists hail from Spain, Germany,

Canada, Pakistan, Australia, and throughout the United States. Among them are Wilco frontman **Jeff Tweedy** (current Chicago resident whose first nationally popular band, Uncle Tupelo, was based in downstate Illinois, and who has been performing extensively as a solo acoustic act this past year); folk legend **Janis Ian** (of “Society’s Child” and “At Seventeen” fame, of course); the jaw-droppingly powerful guitar duo **Julian Lage** and **Chris Eldridge**; Spanish flamenco composer and virtuoso guitarist **Vicente Amigo**, one of the flamenco world’s most renowned players; Australian classical guitarist **Alberta Khoury**, a protégé of **Sharon Isbin**, from Juilliard; gypsy jazz guitarist duo **Lulo Reinhardt** (great-nephew of

Django!) and **Daniel Stelter**; roots and blues musicians **Jontavious Willis** and **Ruthie Foster** (read a Q&A with her in the August 2017 issue of *AG*); Chicago singer-songwriter and guitarist **Ryley Walker**; Hawaiian slack-key wizard **Makana**; an exceptional quartet led by jazz/Indian-influenced guitarist **Rez Abbasi** (performing a new score for a 1929 German silent film called *A Throw of Dice*, based on a story from the Indian epic tale *The Mahabharata*); the Spanish duo of **Antonio Toledo**, an acoustic guitar master, and **Germán López**, a five-string *timple* (pronounced “TIM-play”) virtuoso.

For the complete lineup and ticker information, visit ellnoraguitarfestival.com.



PHIL NICHOLLS

SARAH MCQUAID WINS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The superb British DADGAD guitarist **Sarah McQuaid** (profiled in the October 2015 issue of *AG*) was presented with a lifetime achievement award at this year's popular Ards International Guitar Festival in Northern Ireland (near Belfast), now in its twentieth year. McQuaid is the first female guitarist to win the award, which has previously been bestowed upon such illustrious guitarists as **Davey Graham**, **John Renbourn**, **Martin Simpson**, **Martin Carthy**, **Pierre Bensusan**, **John Martyn**, and others. McQuaid has been working on her fifth solo album and is hoping to write a sequel to *The Irish DADGAD Guitar Book*, originally published in 1995 and still available online through Amazon, Sheet Music Plus, and numerous other outlets. —B.J.



NEW ESSENTIAL JOHN PRINE BOOK

Over the course of his more than four-decade career, the supremely literate and passionate singer-songwriter-guitarist **John Prine** has amassed a large and extremely devoted following in every corner of the USA and in many countries around the world. Many of those fans will no doubt be delighted by the publication of a book called *John Prine Beyond Words* (put out by his Nashville-based label Oh Boy Records), which over the course of around 180 large-format pages offers more than 100 photographs from Prine's personal collection,

covering his early life and the entire scope of his career; reproductions of handwritten (or typed) lyrics for many of his best-known songs; occasional remarks from Prine about the writing and recording of various tunes; cool "scrapbook" items such as newspaper and magazine reviews (along with his surprise appearance in a "Dear Abby" column); plus the complete lyrics and (mostly simple) chords for 65 of his songs, from such memorable early numbers as "Angel from Montgomery," "Sam Stone," "Paradise," "Hello in There," "Bruised Orange," and "Sweet Revenge" to more recent tunes like "Crazy as a

Loon" and "Glory of True Love." Needless to say, there are songs that show his sometimes absurd, sometimes acerbic sense of humor, such as "Let's Talk Dirty in Hawaiian" and "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You into Heaven Anymore." With such a vast and varied catalog to choose from (at least two dozen albums), there are bound to be frustrating omissions (like more from my favorite, *Common Sense*!), but it's impossible not to be impressed and profoundly moved by the scope and the depth of what is here. Prine has always been, and remains to this day, a true American original. —B.J.



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An enviable sense of rhythm seems to flow through Cubans.





Letter from **cuba**

by melinda newman

Street musicians performing in Havana.



EDGAR JIMENEZ

Spend any time in Cuba and several times a day you will likely hear street musicians strumming an acoustic guitar to “Guantanamera,” which is to be expected, and “Hotel California,” which is not.

I arrive in Cuba as a walking music store, bringing with me more than 200 sets of acoustic and electric strings for guitar, bass, violin, mandolin, and banjo. They had been donated by professional musicians, string manufacturers, and an LA-based guitar shop (Truetone Music) with a near-fervent zeal to help out their musical brethren in need.

Folk singer-songwriter and guitarist David Baerwald personally gathered dozens of string donations from professional guitarist friends—who have played with the likes of Paul McCartney, Sting, and Beck—and even threw in a mandolin and an electric bass, the latter packaged with bulky fishing tackle and rods we were delivering to Baracoa, a remote village devastated by Hurricane Matthew in October.

It's not only that strings (much less guitars)

are hard to find in Cuba—even in the major, relatively modern city of Havana—it's that the cost is far out of financial reach for the average Cuban, for whom privation is a way of life (the average state salary is the equivalent of \$18/month). That makes the omnipresence of music, by amateurs and professionals, all the more remarkable. Thanks to the lifting of strict travel restrictions between the USA and Cuba in 2014, American tourists like me are flocking in droves to experience what was glimpsed in films such as the music documentary *Buena Vista Social Club*. In 2016, a record 4 million people visited Cuba.

The acoustic guitar is believed to be the first instrument heard in Cuba, following conch shells. It is as essential to the Cuban zeitgeist as cigars and rum, serving as the accompaniment to 500 years' worth of often turbulent history and a wide array of influences including African, Haitian, Spanish, and French.

An enviable sense of rhythm seems to flow through Cubans, capturing an irrepressible spirit and joy. In any public place where there is music (and there is almost always music), there is salsa dancing, which children apparently come out of the womb knowing how to do.

Though isolated through location and government-controlled media since the late communist leader Fidel Castro overthrew the capitalist government in 1959, the island state of 11 million has always figured out a way to keep the music flowing. (One of the more popular digital-age means is what is known as “The Package,” a one-gigabyte memory stick filled with American media, including downloaded music and movies, brought to Cubans from abroad. That could explain the ubiquity of “Hotel California.”)

Our first stop is Santiago de Cuba, on the southeastern end of the island, roughly 700 miles from Havana. Santiago, where, curiously enough, Graham Greene wrote *Our Man In Havana*, is home to *trova*—a musical style influenced by the French community which came to Santiago from Haiti.

The contemporary *trova*—called *nueva trova* and defined as *trova* music played after 1959—owes a debt to the US folk music of Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez. Groups of *trova* players roamed post-revolution Cuba. Rock 'n' roll wasn't officially sanctioned, but they listened to music smuggled in or passed from musician to musician. The undercover nature of the era earned it the tag “generation of the mole,” said Cuban singer-songwriter and music historian Frank Delgado.

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CUBAN RHYTHM: A PRIMER

Get a taste of some basics with these 4 examples | By Adam Perlmutter

The *clave* is the rhythmic foundation of Cuban music. The most common clave types are the 3-2 and the 2-3, alternating between three and two strikes in each bar. These patterns are often played on the claves, a pair of short wooden dowels. To get a feel for the clave, tap your foot in steady quarters and drum the rhythms on the soundboard of your guitar.

3-2 clave **2-3 clave**

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff is for the 3-2 clave, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. It contains two measures: the first measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note; the second measure has a quarter note, a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The second staff is for the 2-3 clave, also in 4/4 time. It contains two measures: the first measure has a quarter note, a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter note; the second measure has a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note.

This is an example of a *montuno*, or basic rhythmic pattern heard in much Cuban music, arranged for fingerstyle guitar. In learning this highly syncopated figure, it might be helpful to think of the music in terms of vertical snapshots rather than rhythmically independent lines: pinch strings 2 and 5 on beat 1, strings 3 and 6 on the “and” of beat 2, and so on. Practice the music slowly until you can play it on autopilot, then try transferring the pattern to other chords.

The image shows a musical score for a montuno pattern in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The middle staff is a guitar staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is a bass staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in 4/4 time. The treble staff has a melody of eighth notes. The guitar staff has a melody of eighth notes. The bass staff has a melody of eighth notes. The music is written in 4/4 time. The treble staff has a melody of eighth notes. The guitar staff has a melody of eighth notes. The bass staff has a melody of eighth notes.

Son—a hybrid of Spanish guitar and African rhythms—is a style of central importance to Cuban music. After you’ve mastered this classic son pattern based on a stock chord progression, I–V (Am–E7) in the key of A minor, transpose it to other keys and progressions as well.

Am **E7**

The image shows a musical score for a son pattern in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The middle staff is a guitar staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is a bass staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in 4/4 time. The treble staff has a melody of eighth notes. The guitar staff has a melody of eighth notes. The bass staff has a melody of eighth notes. The music is written in 4/4 time. The treble staff has a melody of eighth notes. The guitar staff has a melody of eighth notes. The bass staff has a melody of eighth notes.

Here’s a typical pattern played on a tres—a small guitar with three string courses, tuned G C E or A D F#—arranged for standard six-string guitar. Note the extensive use of syncopation. If the rhythms seem tricky, then subdivide, or count the music in eighth notes instead of quarters. Also note that the pattern outlines a I–ii (C–Dm) progression in the key of C major.

C **Dm**

The image shows a musical score for a tres pattern in 2/4 time. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The middle staff is a guitar staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is a bass staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in 2/4 time. The treble staff has a melody of eighth notes. The guitar staff has a melody of eighth notes. The bass staff has a melody of eighth notes. The music is written in 2/4 time. The treble staff has a melody of eighth notes. The guitar staff has a melody of eighth notes. The bass staff has a melody of eighth notes.



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Santiago is also famous for *son*, a style that dates back possibly as far as the 16th century and became the basis for almost any kind of Cuban music after it spread to Havana 100 years or so ago. *Son*, like most music in Cuba, is a hybrid—a blend of Spanish folk guitar melodies and African rhythms.

During our first dinner in Santiago, a trio—composed of a vocalist, acoustic guitarist, and bongo player—runs through Cuba's greatest hits and Spanish-language classics ranging from the extremely popular “Chan Chan” to “Besame Mucho,” all in *son* style. The music sways as gently as the palm trees behind us, grounded in the guitar and the hypnotic drum beat.

Two days later, we take a 10-minute boat ride to Cayo Granma, an island of 1,600, famous for being the playground of the rich before the revolution—the Bacardi (rum) family's pink mansion still stands here. Before and since the revolution, it has primarily been a fishing village, with swordfish and red snapper all within relatively easy reach of its shores.

As we sit down for a lunch of local catch, a trio serenades us. Two of the players—the acoustic guitarist and the bongo player—are two-thirds of the trio we saw the first night. Other than “Hotel California,” every song's intro sounds like “House of the Rising Sun,” until they actually play that Animals hit.

When I hand the acoustic guitarist, Paco, a few packages of strings, I get an unexpected, but not (I soon discover) uncommon reaction. He tears up, clutches the strings to his heart, and says “*mi corazón*,” before hugging me and adding that he can't get strings in Cuba. Paco and his guitar seem melded together. Holding it high, he often conspiratorially rests his cheek on it, as if they're sharing secrets. His guitar has no strap pins, so he hooks his strap into the top and bottom of the sound hole. Like many guitarists in Cuba, Paco is self-taught, learning to play from watching musicians on TV.

Twenty miles outside Santiago, we stop at El Cobre, home of Cuba's shrine to the revered la Virgen de la Caridad. El Cobre is also home to the El Cobre Cultural Center, an after-school program that teaches painting, dancing, singing, and music. For a country that is lacking in so many basics (try getting on the internet anywhere other than Havana), Cuba puts a premium on arts education and literacy, boasting a 99% literacy rate. Most guitarists receive European-based classical training at university, often learning the more traditional Cuban styles on their own.

At the El Cobre Cultural Center, we are treated to a performance by a steel drum band that reflects the Caribbean influence on the eastern side of the island, and, of course, ends with an encore of “Hotel California.” We donate enough strings and art supplies to fund several months' worth of programs.

A few days later, outside of Baracoa, during a performance of indigenous dance, we come across our first *tres*, a small guitar with three pairs of unison strings that sounds like a cross between a mandolin and a regular guitar when plucked. The five-piece band has been together for more than 35 years, playing traditional music from Eastern Cuba, including *changui*, a rhythmic, mystical style from Guantanamo.

In the colorful Spanish colonial city of Trinidad, we meet Jesus Bello, one of Cuba's premier singers and guitarists. He became a star while in the traditional Cuban band Sierra Maestra and now has added “educator” to his resume. On a rooftop under a full moon, he and some of his students run through traditional Cuban songs. His son plays acoustic guitar; Bello plays a Russian bass made in the 1970s. “It's impossible to get instruments here,” he says, so Bello tends to make his own, including an upright electric bass. David Baerwald's bass and mandolin find a good home with Bello and his son.

Our last stop is Havana. Strolling through the streets of central Havana as the ubiquitous 1950s American cars cruise by, it seems as though every picturesque block is lined with musicians. A trumpeter clad in a smart, white suit stands out against a blue-and-green-tiled wall, channeling Dizzy Gillespie—a hero to many Cubans for his trailblazing work with Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo in the 1940s, which heralded the birth of Afro-Cuban jazz.

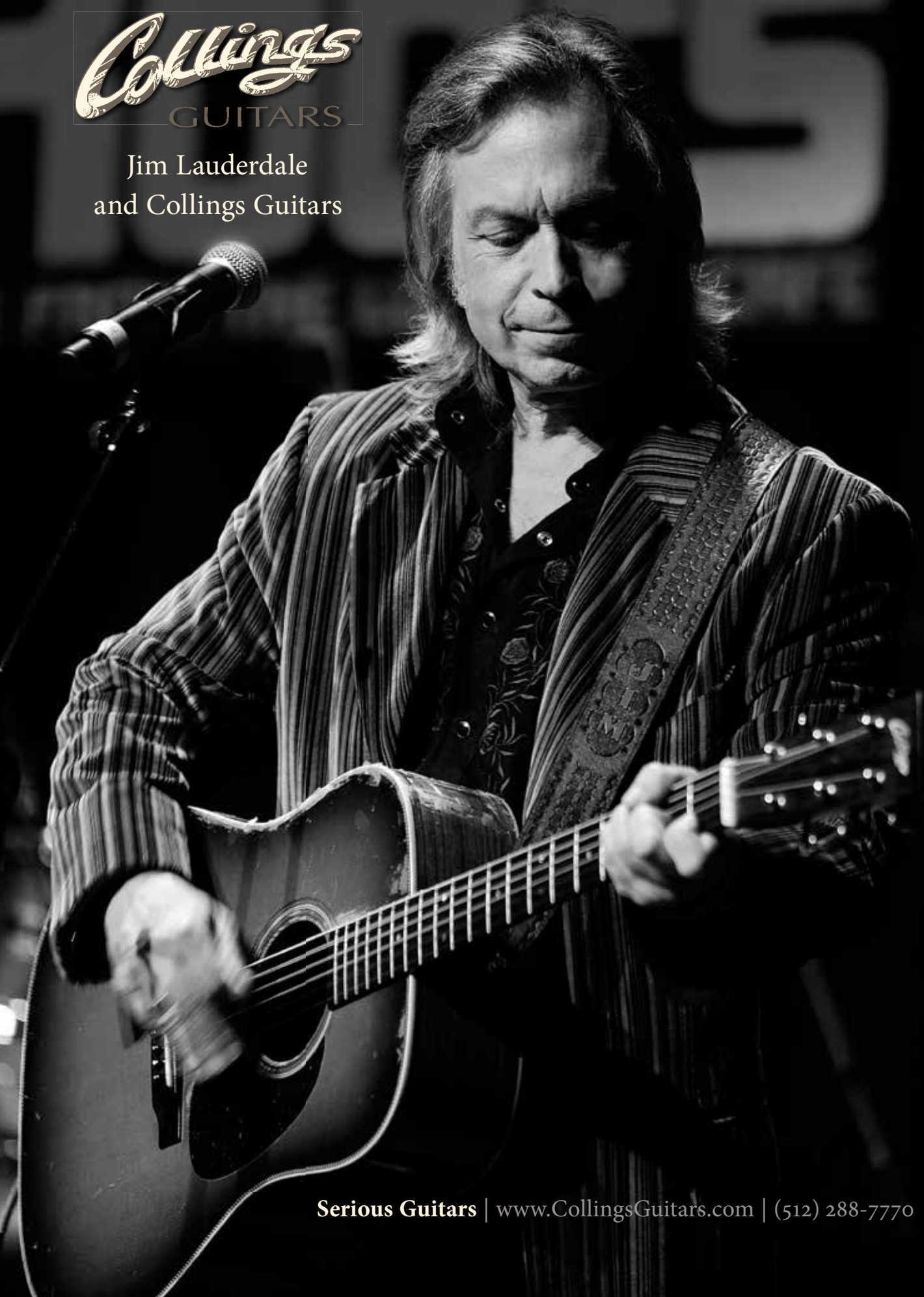
On a perpendicular street, a trio of musicians—two old-timers on guitar and their acolyte on a small Afro-Cuban drum—serenade passers-by. I stop to give them my last set of strings. The gregarious leader grabs my hand and kisses it repeatedly. Upon hearing



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Musicians entertain diners at an open-air restaurant.

BEN BUA

I'm from the USA, he declares they will play a mini-concert of American music just for me. A buoyant "Oh! Susanna" is followed by a doleful "My Way," and, yes, "Hotel California."

For many Americans, their first introduction to Cuban music was through the Buena Vista Social Club, a loose collective of veteran Cuban musicians—many already in their 70s— assembled by guitarist Ry Cooder and British producer Nick Gold. Those sessions yielded their hit 1997 album, *Buena Vista Social Club*, and an acclaimed documentary by the same name.

That outfit recorded much of their material at Egrem Studios, our next stop, situated on a narrow, rundown side street in old Havana. The studio opened in the 1940s as the home for the Cuban Symphony Orchestra, but was taken over by the state in 1959 after the revolution. The Rolling Stones were scheduled to stop by Egrem Studios during their historic free Havana concert, which drew more than 500,000 people in March 2016, but time didn't permit. They left their mark behind though, donating much of their equipment to Cuban schools.

The studio was built to capture Cuban music live, so behind the wood-paneled walls of the main studio are sheets of fiberglass that make acoustic instruments sound more

vibrant. Three small windowless isolation rooms in the back record percussion, while vocals are cut live on the main floor. After Buena Vista Social Club's success, musicians flocked to Egrem. "This studio is like our Abbey Road," says engineer Raul Arroyo.

On our next-to-last night, we go to a family-run restaurant (called a *paladar*, which serves as an alternative to state-run restaurants) for an intimate concert by Carlos Varela, who is known as the Bob Dylan of Cuba, or as Jackson Browne referred to him in the 2015 documentary of the same name, *The Poet of Havana*. The *nueva trova* singer-songwriter, who has also played with Bonnie Raitt and Dave Matthews, tackles challenging topics in his folk-based rock songs, including political oppression, immigration, and, of course, romance. He was the first troubadour to come to the USA after Obama took office, playing to adoring crowds in Miami. He and Browne became fast friends after Browne visited Cuba. Browne recorded "Walls and Doors," a song Varela penned about freedom, on his 2014 album *Standing in the Breach*. The song sounds straight out of Browne's playbook: melodic and mid-tempo, while building with a gentle urgency.

Varela plays a hollow-body electric guitar with a Spanish guitar headstock that he

When I hand the acoustic guitarist, Paco, a few packages of strings, I get an unexpected, but not (I soon discover) uncommon reaction. He tears up, clutches the strings to his heart, and says 'mi corazon,' before hugging me and adding that he can't get strings in Cuba.

picked up during his travels. "It's very difficult to find an instrument in Cuba," says Varela's guitarist Roberto Gomez. "We have to find them in US or Canada or they are passed down after someone dies." He adds his dream guitar would be a Fender Stratocaster.

As Varela's music flows through the gate of the restaurant, people gather in the street to listen and try to catch a glimpse of him over the wall. In many ways their plight resembles that of the musicians in Cuba—they are deterred by difficulties, but remain undaunted and resolute. **AC**



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GROUP EFF

When the Guitar Foundation of America (GFA) added a weeklong Guitar Summit—with its adjunct youth orchestra—to its offerings at the annual convention this past June, it gave national validation to what schools across the country already know: the classical guitar is a rising star, especially when played in multiples.

The emergence of the guitar orchestra, or ensemble (of 16 players or more) as they also are known, offers a new platform for the enjoyment of an instrument that has traditionally been a “solo” endeavor, or at most a foursome.

“There has been an explosion of guitar education across the USA,” says guitarist and educator Matt Denman, who since 2013 has been GFA’s director of education. A large part of what Denman does in his position is advise schools interested in establishing guitar orchestras.

“We’re a bunch of loners,” says Denman, of guitarists in general. “We spend a lot of time alone, and we like it. But we can also long for a musical experience with other like-minded individuals. That’s happening with thousands of students all over the country.” Denman adds that playing only guitars and doing so en masse “promotes art from a way not done before,” echoing sentiments by fans and educators in Austin, Texas; Clark County School District in Las Vegas; and Oklahoma City—where Denman teaches guitar at Oklahoma City University (OCU) and serves as director of the Celedonio Romero Guitar Institute there.

He knows of what he advises. His 26-member OCU Guitar Ensemble opened the Guitar Foundation of America’s 2015 convention and performed one of his compositions.

Yet nowhere is the surge in popularity more apparent than in Arizona, already ahead of the curve with its rich Latin culture and appreciation of the esteemed Spanish classical guitar. As one guitar aficionado quipped of Tucson, “It seems like we have a guitar festival year-round.”

GUITAR HEAVEN

From all-guitar ensembles at schools to energized guitar societies and renowned college and university guitar programs, all of which offer public performances, Arizona is well-tuned for play. So much so that, almost on a



The 32 members of the Arizona Guitar Orchestra during rehearsal for its 2017 three-city tour. Center, kneeling, conductor Charles “Chuck” Hulihan. Far left, front row, José Luis Puerta, conductor of the Tucson Guitar Society Orchestra.

whim, it formed its own statewide guitar orchestra, aptly named the Arizona Guitar Orchestra, now in its fourth year.

The members of the orchestra are accomplished amateurs, some older or retired, but mostly young players associated with the orchestra’s four founders: the Grand Canyon Guitar Society in Flagstaff; the Tucson Guitar Society in partnership with the Bolton Guitar Studies Program at the University of Arizona; Glendale Community College near Phoenix; and Arizona State University in Tempe. Each of the

founders selected eight players for the orchestra of 32 who performed this season.

Granted, the orchestra’s season is short—three days, during which the group travels to and performs in Flagstaff, Tempe, and Tucson. This year the program featured the Grammy-winning Los Angeles Guitar Quartet (LAGQ), which was joined for the finale by the Arizona orchestra playing the world premiere of its commissioned piece from composer and former LAGQ member Andrew York, “By Chants.”

ORT

Orchestra. “We consider this a partnership of the guitar culture in Arizona.”

From Hulihan’s perspective, the guitar is experiencing a “renaissance” at the high school level, and that enthusiasm for both the instrument and group performance is “trickling up” to the college level. “I truly believe it is the ‘trickle up’ that will make guitar ensembles mainstream 10 to 20 years from now,” says Hulihan. Besides, as younger players are discovering, “it’s more fun to play with other people.”



JOSE LUIS PUERTA

Inspired by York’s visit to the Grand Canyon and a centuries-old gambling dance from the native Havasupai, who live in the canyon’s depths, its name is a play on the “by chance” that wagering represents.

“We thought, why not, Arizona is way too small for us to not team up,” says Charles “Chuck” Hulihan, the orchestra’s conductor. Hulihan has been director of the award-winning guitar program at Glendale Community College since 1999 and is also director of the Guitar Foundation of America’s Youth Guitar

MOVE OVER, FOOTBALL

The rising enthusiasm for guitar ensembles is bubbling over at Maryvale High School in Phoenix. Located in one of the poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhoods in the city, the school is internationally known and honored for its Advanced Touring Guitar Ensemble.

The first high school guitar ensemble to be featured at the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) convention in 2008, the Maryvale ensemble has played concerts in Vienna, Austria, with the Vienna Boys Choir, and at the Pantheon in Rome. Its members have participated in the Arizona Guitar Orchestra; also noteworthy, 12 of the 26 players, sophomores to seniors, are girls, until recently a distinct minority in the guitar world.

The touring group represents only a portion of the students playing guitar at Maryvale: the program that James Yancey built now reaches 250 students enrolled in four of his beginning and intermediate classes.

Yancey’s work and results are so impressive the district has found the funds—along with outside fundraising efforts and benefactors—to purchase 300 quality guitars. Most are nylon-stringed classical instruments, but Yancey also has 60 steel-string acoustic guitars, six bass guitars, and three requinto and three contra guitars from Spain. The latter two would be a dream come true for any guitar orchestra or large ensemble, for the range of sound these cousins add to the all-guitar experience.

“Maryvale’s Touring Guitar is the varsity football team,” says Yancey, proudly elaborating, “They are the shining star on this campus.”

“Statistically speaking, band, orchestra, and choir are shrinking in school programs throughout the USA,” adds Yancey, who started the guitar program in 1999, a year after founding the school’s choral program. “Guitar is growing exponentially. It is becoming huge.”

Yancey teaches guitar like he taught choir: vocally. “I sing a lot for them. I demand that they make their instrument sing. Playing notes is not music. . . . Music comes from deep inside your soul.”

Student Diana Carreon, 18, a senior and conductor of the touring group, says Yancey “really helps the students understand how to

Inside the classical guitar orchestra craze and its unlikely epicenter, Arizona

BY KAREN PETERSON

shape a phrase and in essence create great music. I love how well we work together as a group, and we all have the same goal, which is playing some wonderful music and expressing that to others."

OPEN TO ALL

José Luis Puerta, director of education and conductor of the Tucson Guitar Society's Tucson Guitar Orchestra (TGO), is no stranger to guitar-only ensembles. Growing up in Puerto Rico, as a youth he attended Escuela Libre de Musica, where participation in large ensembles was mandatory.

Large ensembles and full orchestras give students "a sense of belonging," says Puerta, who recently received his doctorate in guitar performance and ethnomusicology from the Bolton Guitar Studies Program at the University of Arizona. And ensembles like the TGO, which performs throughout the year and includes high school and college-age players, give students of all skill levels a chance to participate.

"Even if you are not the greatest player, there is a part for you in an ensemble," says Puerta, a TGO member before he was tapped four years ago to be its conductor and artistic director.

Guitar orchestras also provide young

guitarists with a sense of accomplishment. "They start the semester saying, 'This is too hard, it's not going to happen.' Then they begin to see progress," says Puerta.

For Puerta, an educator and performer, the role of conductor has expanded his understanding of making music. "For the conductor, the orchestra is an instrument: to make 30 sound like one is harder than it looks," he jokes, sort of.

For the guitarists, the primary challenge is having a conductor at all, let alone having to follow his lead—looking down at their hands, not up at a person, is their norm.

"There is a lot of back and forth between the player and the conductor—a lot of communication—and that's difficult to teach," says Puerta, adding that it comes down to "trusting each other."

And performance, he advises, is about "trusting yourself and having fun. I tell [players] not to worry. If their fingering and phrasing is solid, all will come together."

MESSAGE OF HOPE

Fingering and phrasing did come together April 2 in Tucson, where the Arizona Guitar Orchestra played its last performance of the season, and breezed through the challenges of the exotic "By Chants" in its finale with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet.

LAGO's William Kanengiser, who played the role of the shaman in York's Arizona-influenced composition—"It's very cool to play music inspired by the landscape," he says—is no stranger to the Arizona Guitar Orchestra, or to Craig Yarbrough, executive director of the Grand Canyon Guitar Society in Flagstaff.

Four years ago, the two friends were ruminating about the LAGO's fascination with a piece that was written for Kanengiser by Japanese composer Shingo Fujii, *Concierto de Los Angeles* for solo and guitar orchestra.

"We said, 'Let's do the piece and take it on the road,'" says Kanengiser, and they did, in 2014, in an ad hoc collaboration with the state's tightly knit guitar community.

The Arizona Guitar Orchestra was born—and participating in it was Kanengiser's first experience with a full guitar orchestra. "We rehearsed together, toured together, hung out together. There was a bonding between orchestra members," he says.

Kanengiser's take-away from the experience—guitar orchestras are "a metaphor for the human endeavor." At their core, he says, they express the "hopeful message of passing along a tradition from older players to a younger generation, not on YouTube but [through] a physical experience together. The benefit of that conversation for younger players is enormous." **AC**

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For 35 years, local musicians have made the weekly trek to McClurg.



KATLYN MCCONNELL/OZARKSALIVE.COM

The Ups & Downs of the Deep Ozarks Sound

At the McClurg jam, old-time music soars above the hills and hollers

BY KAREN PETERSON

Dramamine is in order when driving through the dense oak and hickory forests of southern Missouri, on roads with sidwinder curves and stomach-dropping dips into steep draws. Welcome to the hills and hollers of the Ozarks, a lonesome, lissome, rollercoaster landscape that flows from Missouri south into Arkansas.

For many Americans, unversed in the traditions and culture of the isolated Ozarks countryside, these remote hills conjure romantic tales of moonshiners, hillbillies, and such notorious outlaws as Frank and Jesse James. More recently, the area meth labs served as a backdrop for the gritty 2011 Oscar-nominated film *Winter's Bone*, shot on location just a few miles from my destination, tiny McClurg in Taney County, 60 winding miles south of Springfield, Missouri, in the sprawling Mark Twain National Forest. Inside a country store at 3899 State Hwy. W.—a non-descript, whitewashed clapboard building that once housed the local post office—stereotypes dissolve and time stands still: Music takes over.

Music has put McClurg and its rollicking Monday-night jams on the map. Not just any music, mind you—Ozarks roots music, a style mostly obscure to all but those who live here, or those curious enough to seek it out.

The origins of the music date back hundreds of years in this neck of the greater Ozarks range, known as “the deep Ozarks,” a bastion of old-time fiddle music. And it traces back hundreds of years more to the British Isles, ancestral homeland for a large portion of the early Ozarks settlers. In this isolated environment, both social and physical, the old tunes and the traditional way of learning them—by ear—have survived pretty much intact.

For 35 years, local musicians have made the weekly trek to McClurg, fiddlers and guitarists primarily, though sometimes only guitarists show up, with many of them veteran Monday-night regulars. No formal invitation is needed to drop in. No skill set is refused. All are welcome, whether to play or listen, though it is best to follow house rules if playing is the goal—the McClurg jam is all-acoustic, all the time.

“There are no electric instruments, no amplification of any kind at McClurg,” says Alvie Dooks, 87, who became a guitar legend as the dexterous partner to the esteemed finger-flying fiddler Bob Holt, who died in 2006. “We played five square dances a month for 28 years,” Dooks says of his association with Holt. “He was quite a fiddler, and he played

fast. He played to the dancer. That was what made him such a great fiddler in this part of the world. I had to keep up the rhythm for three or four hours.

“Sometimes he’d play the same tune differently from one set to another, just for the dancers,” adds Dooks, whose task was to anticipate his partner’s detours. “I don’t care what kind of music it is, the bottom line is timing.”

Dooks has been jamming at McClurg since its beginnings. “If I’m able to hold my head up, I go,” he quips.

And he’s been playing Ozarks music since he first held a guitar 77 years ago. “Sally Goodin,” “Eighth of January,” and “Forked Deer” were among the first old-time tunes he remembers hearing, played by his father, a fiddler.



On this night, Dooks is at the McClurg jam, not playing, but helping the evening’s lead fiddler, David Scrivner—a former student of Holt’s—fix his bow. (Dooks’s day job is repairing violins.) He likes to tell newcomers to the jam that he “played for Hillary Clinton,” which he and Holt did in 1999, when the National Endowment for the Arts awarded Holt a National Heritage Fellowship.

Dooks himself is a master of his craft, an honor bestowed by the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program of the Missouri Folk Arts Program. Today, he is a mentor and sought-after performer at the numerous folk-music events and festivals held annually in Missouri and Arkansas. Yet, when it comes to everyday Ozarks music and its authentic expression, Dooks says, “McClurg is about the only place where this style exists anymore.”

WHAT IT IS—AND ISN’T

Jams like McClurg’s are as ubiquitous in the Ozarks as the old juke joints that once dotted the Mississippi Delta, and their purpose is the same: to bring rural people together for food, fun, and music, which is particularly the case

among Ozarkers, who by preference settled and continue to live miles from one another. As my Ozarks cousin advises, deadpan, “Two or three miles apart can be too close.”

Music provides community for this self-imposed isolation, and it is played out in a variety of venues, from cozy “music parties” in private homes to larger spaces, where people could enjoy what the music is really about—dancing, mostly square dancing and jigging.

That’s what you understand first and foremost about the music at the McClurg jam. You can’t sit still, you can’t keep a toe from tapping.

As for its unique regional style, no one really knows what to say about it, including Dooks. “It’s hard to really define the old-time music. It’s just something I’ve been around all my life, and it hasn’t changed a lot over the past 50 years,” he says. “Old musicians learned all those old tunes by ear. They played them like they learned them, maybe with some variations, then passed ‘em down.”

What Ozarks music *isn’t* is perhaps the best way to describe what it is. First, you can call it traditional or old-time or old-timey music, but never bluegrass. Ozarks music preceded bluegrass, and its dominant instrument is the fiddle accompanied by the guitar—the rhythm machine—not the banjo. (Persnickety old-time fiddlers have been known to walk off stage if a banjo appears.)

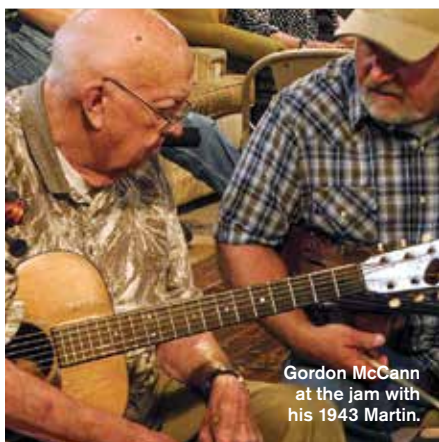
With subtle regional variations, traditional Ozarks music is akin to Appalachian music, for it was the Scots-Irish from Appalachia who migrated to this stretch of the Ozarks in the early 1800s, along with German and French settlers. It’s not weighted toward pure Irish music, however. (The Scots-Irish were Protestant.)

Traditional Ozarks music, as described in an article from the hosts of “Seldom Heard Music,” a long-running, mostly bluegrass show on KSMU-FM, Ozarks Public Radio, “is Irish music, and it’s not; it is Appalachian music, and it’s not. It runs between those cultures and adds elements of others—it’s very distinct, but not in ways that are easily defined or captured.”

A NATIONAL TREASURE

It may be undefined, but the songs and their variations are plentiful. “Some fiddlers know 400 to 500 tunes, and from holler to holler you can hear them played in a slightly different way, each player putting his own lick to it,” says guitarist Gordon McCann. Another McClurg regular, McCann performed for 17 years with celebrated fiddler Art Galbraith.

Beyond their many appearances in the Ozarks, Galbraith, who died in 1993, and McCann, 85, played national folk festivals,



Gordon McCann
at the jam with
his 1943 Martin.

KATHY GOODMAN

including the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and the National Folk Festival at Wolf Trap, as well as the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans. They recorded on Rounder Records—McCann performed on five albums, including the three-volume series *Traditional Fiddle Music of the Ozarks*, and he recently reissued the duo's *Dixie Blossoms* on the Musical Traditions label. McCann also co-authored the Mel Bay instructional book *Ozarks Fiddle Music*.

Unlike Dooms' fiddling partner, Holt, Galbraith played to a slower beat. "He was one of the smoothest musicians around," McCann says. "People would joke after he'd played a hoedown, 'Well, that was a good waltz.'"

McCann's contribution to traditional music is one of two gifts that makes people like Mike Smith, founder and co-host of KSMU's "Seldom Heard Music," praise him as "a national treasure."

Forty-five years ago, then a Springfield businessman, McCann decided to take up the guitar seriously and began visiting local jams, where players were happy to oblige as mentors to this adult student—one of them future partner Galbraith.

"I saw an article in the paper about a musical gathering every Saturday in Ozark [a small town near Springfield, Missouri]. I'd never seen anything like it—musicians setting up around an old coffee table in a room with old chairs, sofas, and a pot-bellied stove, with one 200-watt bulb hanging from the ceiling and duct tape covering broken pieces of the plate-glass windows.

"I was amazed," says McCann, who began to record his tireless visits to jams and other local music events—the better to learn by. "I took my son's recorder and I'd just keep it on," he says, "then I'd come home and listen to the guitar-playing."

It wasn't just the music he captured on the recorder that turned out to be of special interest: McCann's tapes had serendipitously

picked up conversations—the idle chatter going on behind the music. McCann's recordings included Ozarks slices of life, and ethnographers were as thrilled as musicologists and folk-art scholars when in 2007 he donated the bulk of his four decades of meticulous research to Missouri State University's Special Collections Department. The Gordon McCann Collection at MSU includes 3,000 audio and videocassette recordings, 8,000 field notes, and a database with more than 70,000 entries and 30,000 scrapbook pages of photographs and flyers—all specific to traditional music and Ozarks culture, and that doesn't count what remains in McCann's home and personal library.

"I've been called a folklorist," says McCann, "but I'm really a packrat."

Aside from the wealth of material he has donated, what sets the collection apart from other notable Ozarks music archives is McCann's penchant for specifics. "I noted who was there and what they were playing in my transcriptions," he says. "People have told me they have never seen as detailed a collection."

BACK TO MCCLURG

McCann is at McClurg this evening, playing his treasured 1943 Martin 00-18, which he snagged years ago for \$250 during a festival under the Gateway Arch in downtown St. Louis. "I followed the guy to the Porta-Potty to find out if he'd sell it to me," says McCann. "I've been offered \$3,000 for it."

On this night, six guitarists, three fiddlers, a couple of banjo players, and a McClurg newcomer with a standup bass encircle the standard prop, the coffee table. Among the guitarists are

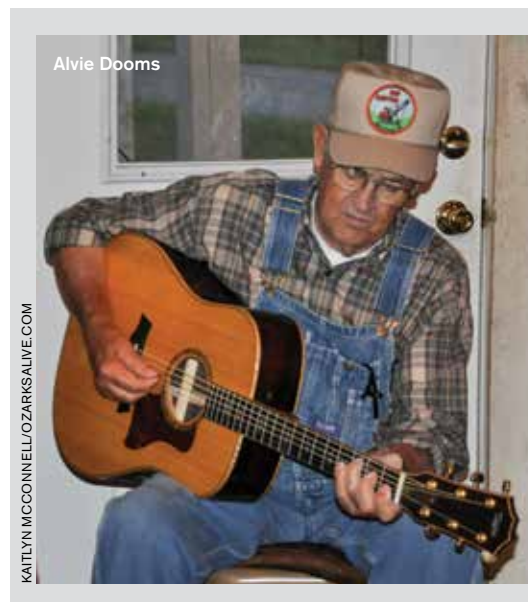
father and son Dennis and D.J. Shumate, who can be seen jamming in 2011's *Winter's Bone*. McCann helped director Debra Granik locate the local musicians featured in the film.

The jam runs from six o'clock until nine or so, the first hour pretty much dedicated to the comfort food potluck: fried chicken, mashed potatoes, pie, and lots of coffee. But by the time the musicians are set up and tuned, spouses and visitors have taken their places on the chairs and couches that line the walls. Throughout the evening, they alternately listen to music, chat with friends, or jump up for an impromptu jig. Also, as they do every Monday night, regulars, including Lonnie Taber, the caretaker of the McClurg building and its jam, sit at a card table playing a game of pitch.

The house is packed, the music divine. But what about the future of the beloved Monday night jams? Dooms and McCann think about that a lot these days. Both have suffered strokes, and both note that the old-time players at McClurg are in their 80s—the oldest among them and playing banjo tonight, JR Johnston, is 88. "You don't play music real good when you're 90," Dooms says with a laugh.

Turning serious, Dooms adds, "When we all die off, I don't know whether McClurg will go on or not."

Then he changes his tone, complimenting the younger players that night, including a 15-year-old girl playing a fine fiddle with the pros. Music is an important aspect of life in the Ozarks, so much so that Dooms usually asks newcomers two pertinent local questions: "Do you play music and do you fish? Sometimes I get a yes to both." **AG**



KATLYN MCCONNELL/OZARKSALIVE.COM

WHAT ALVIE DOOMS PLAYS

Guitarist Alvie Dooms has had plenty of guitars during his lifetime of playing old-time Ozarks music, most of them Martins. But these days he's smitten with a D2H from Collings Guitars out of Austin, Texas. "It's the best instrument I've ever had," Dooms says. "The Collings has got everything beat, for volume, tone balance, playability." He also just traded for "a little old Red Label Yamaha FG-110. Small-bodied guitars weren't my favorite," he says, "but this one knocked my hat off."

An early shot of the Branson Baldknobbers, from left: Jim "Droopy Drawers" Mabe (washboard), unidentified (guitar), Lyle Mabe (washtub bass), Bill Mabe (Dobro), Bob Mabe (banjo), and "Chick" Allen (mule jawbone).





Branson's Brothers in Song

Formed by Bob Mabe and his brothers nearly 60 years ago, the Baldknobbers created the template for the modern-day Branson sound

BY KAREN PETERSON

Dean Holman playing a Scheerhorn resonator with Branson's Famous Baldknobbers in 2012.



Nearly 60 years ago, Bob Mabe and his brothers—Jim, Lyle, and Bill—gathered up a guitar, a Dobro, a washtub bass, and the jawbone of a mule and headed for nearby Branson, then a small town in the lush lake country of the southern Missouri Ozarks.

Their first gig was playing for fishermen angling for trout in the cold deep waters of Lake Taneycomo. They also played the authentic old-time music required for square dances that were held in one of the many caves that vein through the limestone hills. “At 50 degrees, your hands on the guitar got a little cold,” laughs Bob, at 86 the sole surviving Mabe brother.

Within a year of their arrival, the brothers made Ozarks history as the first performers in what would become a lengthy playbill of shows that transformed rural Branson into what it is today, “the live music capital of the world,” and a destination for more than five million visitors annually, all of them lovers of traditional country music as performed by such big stars as Kenny Rogers and the Lennon Sisters. Most have come to visit such attractions as Dolly Parton’s Dixie Stampede and are appreciative of Branson’s reputation for good, clean Midwestern family-style fun.

“I told my brothers that before long we’d be making maybe \$100 a week,” Mabe recalls

with a grin. “It took about ten years, but we made a lot more than that.”

The show that the Mabes developed—the Baldknobbers Jamboree—remains one of the most popular acts in a town teeming with first-rate entertainment.

Still a family affair, and calling on a third generation of Mabes (and an expanded collection of instruments), from the get-go the Baldknobbers drew inspiration directly from the family’s Ozarks roots: Named after an infamous band of 19th-century vigilantes who once roamed the area, the Mabes Baldknobbers was a vaudeville-style hillbilly act to the hilt, from the scarecrow clothes, goofy expressions, and missing front teeth to what they played and how they played it.

“My brother played the washtub as a bass. He made a good bass out of it, too” Mabe says. The mule jawbone, he says, “is a great rhythm instrument” and playing a comb created an interesting “buzzing sound.”

Locals loved the insider hillbilly gags and humor. A few short years later, the rest of the country got the joke as celebrated by the hit TV sit-com *The Beverly Hillbillies*, which was filmed, in part, on location in Branson. (The series creator, Paul Henning, had the Ozarks in mind when he debuted the show in 1962.)

Baldknobbers humor suited Mabe to a T. “I

love to make people laugh,” says Mabe, who plays guitar as well as fiddle, mandolin, and banjo. “In this old world we need that bad. That’s what it’s all about, making people laugh.

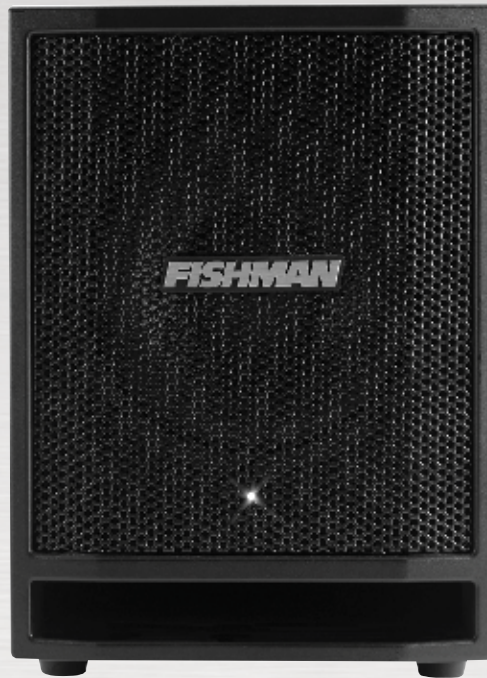
“We didn’t really care if we made money back then,” he says of the musicians that are as plentiful in the Ozarks as hickory sticks. “We’d meet at people’s houses to play, some folks would sing, some would jig dance, sometimes there would be a square dance or a round dance,” he says, adding, “I always played acoustic, never electric.” That was by desire but also out of necessity, since power didn’t come to Mabe’s part of the Ozarks until the 1940s.

Mabe moved on from the Baldknobbers 20 years after the group formed, opening Bob-O-Links Country Hoedown in Branson, complete with square dancers. He later sold it to Jimmy Osmond of the Osmond Brothers.

He also started the Kitchen Band, a traveling revue of country and gospel music that stopped at nursing homes and other organizations serving “people who are down and out. We did it all for free,” he says.

When asked if he ever thought that the brothers would achieve what they did, helping to transform Branson into one of the world’s premiere entertainment centers, Mabe chuckles: “Sweetheart, I never ever thought that. We just started playing. We loved the music.” **AC**

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The Taney County Way

The Creek Rocks help
preserve the music of the
Ozarks, one muskrat at a time

BY KAREN PETERSON

JEREMY SCOTT



JEREMY SCOTT

Home is where the heart and the art are for guitarist Mark Bilyeu and banjo-player Cindy Woolf. Husband and wife, both are professional singers and songwriters in their own right, but in 2015 the couple banded together as the Creek Rocks and released their debut album, *Wolf Hunter*, a tribute to their Ozarks musical heritage. Some of the catchy old tunes stay stubbornly in your head, which means waking up in the morning humming tunes about assorted Ozarks themes: muskrats, possums, funny hats.

"I started realizing that the music of the Ozarks and my family has been taken for granted," says Bilyeu, whose roots in the "deep Ozarks" region of the southern Missouri Ozark range date back five generations, with a host of musicians dangling from the family tree. "The music is not going to be around forever. I want to preserve it, if I can."

Wolf Hunter is part of that preservation effort by Bilyeu and Woolf, whose family is native to Arkansas. The album was culled from the archives of two celebrated 20th-century folklorists, John Quincy Wolf of Batesville, Arkansas, and Max

Hunter of Springfield, Missouri. (The name of the album is a nod to both via their surnames.)

"The Ozarks are blessed to have those collections," Bilyeu says. "There is a lot of material and it's accessible. We'd sit on our couch and pull up the archives on our smartphones. Made the research fun and easy."

The collections, available online through Missouri State University in Springfield and Lyon College in Batesville, are rich in field recordings and feature a cappella vocals. It was from the latter that Creek Rocks drew inspiration. "All that singing was great for the raw material," Bilyeu says. "We'd listen to what they were singing and add to that with our instruments."

For him, research for *Wolf Hunter* became a twofold pleasure. It helped him connect with his musical family—another famous Ozarks folklorist, Vance Randolph, recorded his grandfather's cousin and nine other Bilyeus in 1942. And it allowed him to put his graduate studies in music to practical use. "I wanted to understand things from that [academic] perspective," he says. "I had heard Ozarks music described as Appalachia West, and there are a lot of similarities. So I

looked at the material other people had done, to see if there was any clear distinction between the two. I found only one! The minor key and modal stuff played in Appalachia didn't survive so well in the Ozarks. The Ozarks favor major key tunes."

Religious beliefs in this strip of the Bible Belt also played a role in how music is played and presented. "I grew up around a lot of guitar players who weren't interested in flatpicking and playing bluegrass solos," Bilyeu says. "I think they admired that stuff. But a couple times at family gatherings someone would bust out in a guitar solo and get looks from my uncles. That was too much pride on display—it's a church thing."

One of the most authentic track on *Wolf Hunter* is the last, "Tie-Hacker's Joy," a song written by Bilyeu's great-great uncle, Frank White, using a versatile open-tune style. (See music on p. 42) "It was a popular style in the Bull Creek region," says Bilyeu, referencing Taney County on the border with Arkansas, where his family first settled. "My dad taught it to me from his memory. I ran with it and arranged it, so it's pretty neat for me to record and put it out there." **AC**

WHAT CREEK ROCKS PLAY

Mark Bilyeu's primary guitar is a 1946 Martin D-18 that belonged to his dad's uncle and passed down to a distant cousin. When Bilyeu

learned the guitar was up for sale, he jumped. "The neck was bowed and it was almost unplayable," he says. "But I sent it to a guy in Nashville and it's now absolutely beautiful"

Cindy Woolf plays her dad's banjo and also

has his Martin with a rattlesnake tail inside, an old-timey accessory variously known as a means for repelling mice, for keeping the wood dry, and, in some undefined way, enhancing its tone.



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Guitar tuning: D A D F# A D

Banjo tuning: A D G B D

Moderately 

Guitar

D A7sus4 D A7sus4 D

let ring throughout

5

G D A

1 D D/F# 2 D

Harm.

Guitar repeats same part till bar 32

10 **Banjo**

D A7sus4 D A7sus4 D

let ring throughout

14

G D A

1 D D/F# 2 D

Harm.

8

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Tune to open D (D A D F# A D). Using the second fret on the fourth string and first fret on the third string, “you sort of have your five chord,” says Mark Bilyeu, or, more technically, “it creates a V7sus chord.” Using the first fret

on the third string and the second fret on the second string, “you sort of get your four chord,” he says. More technically, Bilyeu explains, “the notes in this chord are G, B, and D, which one hears on the top four strings. That leaves the two lowest strings as D and A. (The D is the IV chord, though not the root of the chord.)

“Those two low notes ringing out below create a drone effect, which to my ear evokes the drone of bagpipes,” Bilyeu says, “so there’s a Scottish feel to this style, I think. “You can get a lot done with those two chords,” he adds, “and you can also take both up the fretboard two frets to give you even more melodic opportunities.”

19

D A7sus4 D A7sus4 D

23

G D A

1 D D/F# 2 D 8

Harm.

28

D A7sus4 D A7sus4 D

32

Guitar

G D A

1 D 2 8

Harm.

Banjo

8 8 8

Harm.

Generally, guitarists bend wound strings down and unwound strings up.

THE BASICS

5 Steps to Learning Tremolo Picking and Vibrato

Essential techniques to enliven your guitar playing, in any style

BY PAUL MEHLING

THE PROBLEM

You want to develop a machine-gun-like attack with your picking, as heard in tunes like “Minor Swing” by Django Reinhardt and, um, “Sudden Death” by Megadeth, but don’t know where to start. At the same time, you want to make your notes sustain and vibrate like a singer—think Willie Nelson’s interpretation of “Georgia on My Mind” or Maria Callas doing “Ave Maria.”

THE SOLUTION

Focus on repetition, with an emphasis on technique and precision in each hand. Ideally, you’ll acquire new techniques for playing the guitar and immediately put them to use making music by the end of this lesson. But first: technique!

THE STEPS

1 WORK ON PICK CONTROL

The pick is where your tone begins. Working on tremolo picking—a repeated articulation of the string(s), usually done very fast—is a great way to develop pick control, which translates to good tone. The ability to play one note repeatedly with rhythmic precision will also help you play faster and louder. Both of these acquired skills are part of a musical bag of tricks that will allow you to more freely express yourself.

Ease into tremolo picking with the three picking variations shown in **Examples 1a–c**. Start with your metronome set at 60 bpm and gradually increase the setting to 120 bpm or

higher. (If this is challenging, refer to some of my earlier articles, as well as my Homespun DVD *Pick Power*.) Use a super-loose wrist and a relaxed pick grip in playing these examples, and remember to concentrate on rhythmic precision. You really want the metronome’s beats to disappear under your guitar’s sound.

You might have noticed that most of the examples in this lesson are based on a single pitch—the 12th-fret G—but you should obviously try each exercise in a variety of other locations. Thoroughness will keep you from becoming bored with the exercises and, more important, will best prepare you to use the techniques in context.



Example 1a

Example 1b

Example 1c

Example 2a

Example 2b

* \blacksquare = down; \blacktriangledown = up

Example 3a

Example 3b

Example 4

Example 5

Example 6a

Example 6b

Example 7a

Example 7b

2 FOCUS ON VIBRATO

Even if you're not familiar with the term *vibrato*—the manipulation of a tone, usually done with rapid changes in pitch—you've no doubt heard this technique, which can add great emotion to music. Just about any kind of musician, whether it's an operatic singer, violin soloist, or blues guitarist, relies on vibrato to connect with listeners.

There are essentially two ways to play vibrato on guitar: 1) horizontally (like a violinist), where the fretting hand swings back and forth in line with the string, and 2) perpendicularly, where the fretting finger(s) bends and releases the string repeatedly.

Classical guitarists tend to favor the horizontal type of vibrato for its subtlety, while blues and rock guitarists prefer the perpendicular for its power and urgency, as do gypsy-style players. Most gypsy guitarists follow the lead—no pun intended—of Django Reinhardt, whose vocal-like vibrato is one of the things that made him so very different from his contemporaries.

Vibrato is highly personal: some musicians prefer a wild, fast vibrato, while others favor a subtle, slow vibrato. But vibrato is perhaps most effective at moving the listener when its speed matches the tempo of the tune being played. These exercises are done in tempo at various speeds/note values so that you'll be prepared for any musical situation.

Now get started with that vibrato. Try **Example 2a**, in which you bend the string slightly, not more than a half step, picking each beat. Note: Generally, in bending, guitarists pull the wound strings downward with the fretting hand, while pushing the unwound strings upward. Try pulling the high-E string downward and you'll probably pull it right off of the fingerboard! Your fingers shouldn't actually do the pulling; that should be done with your hand and arm, as it's best to use bigger muscles whenever possible.

Experiment with using different fretting fingers when playing with vibrato. You may find that certain fingers are stronger or better at vibrating than others. For me, the first finger—the one I can always rely on to be the fastest/strongest/most accurate finger is not the best for vibrato. So I work on that finger—a lot. Next play **Example 2b**, picking the string every other beat.

3 TRIPLE DOWN

In **Examples 3a–b**, return to the picking exercises, now with eighth-note triplets—three evenly spaced notes per beat. (Try saying, “trip – ah – let” to get the feel.) Guitarists generally tend to play the first note in a triplet with a downstroke and use an alternate picking



Vibrato is highly personal: some musicians prefer a wild, fast vibrato, while others favor a subtle, slow vibrato.

pattern. But, when there are two groups of triplets in a row, playing them that way makes the second group sound a little weak since it starts with an upstroke, like in **Example 3a**. To address this problem, gypsy guitarists often use the picking strategy shown in **Example 3b**, hitting the first beat of the triplet with a downstroke, no matter what. This may require a bit of relearning, which is great—you're becoming not just a gypsy-jazz master but a more fluid guitarist all round.

Don't try to learn too much too soon. It's better to fully master a concept; even if it's only mastered at a slow tempo, it's still mastered!

4 BRING BACK VIBRATO

The current thinking is that multitasking does not work—that you cheat one thing when you try to do two things at once. But as a guitar player, you don't have the luxury of focusing on just one thing—you've got to play with both hands and they're doing two radically different things.

Start with **Example 4**—an exercise with vibrato and eighth-note triplets. Play those triplets with alternating downstrokes and upstrokes. Remember: as with learning any new music, if you cannot cleanly play a given exercise, slow it down. If an exercise is too difficult, drop back to the preceding example. There's no use trying to put more tea in your cup than it can hold. Don't try to learn too much too soon. It's better to fully master a concept; even if it's only mastered at a slow tempo, it's still mastered!

Now try **Example 5**, with tremolo picking in the first bar and a long vibrato-inflected note in the second measure. As with all the exercises, aim for precision—make sure that the note values are equal (no loud/soft notes popping out), and try to match the sound of the vibrato to the sound of the tremolo.

5 IT'S ALL ABOUT CONTEXT

Once you can play all of the exercises above accurately and at tempos above 100 bpm, you can start applying the techniques to anything you play—scales, arpeggios, melodies, and more. **Example 6a** adds vibrato to a scalar phrase. Notice that the vibrato is indicated not as a series of bends, but with a squiggly horizontal line. Remember to do that vibrato as before, in a rhythmic way.

Example 6b is the same idea, but with eighth-note triplets. After you've played Examples 6a and b, try them again but with tremolo picking in the second half of each measure instead of vibrato.

Your last and most difficult exercises, **Examples 7a–b**, have a series of chromatic eighth-note triplets, punctuated with vibrato and tremolo picking. In the last measure of **Example 7b** you'll find the sign for tremolo picking—the slanted parallel lines in notation and tablature. Again, play these in a measured way and be careful not to drop the time when you switch between the triplets and the tremolo or vibrato.

Working on techniques like these can be frustrating as you try to grind off the rough edges of your playing—it can illuminate various things you need work on, and that can be an ego-killer. But don't lose hope. Remember that the better connected you are to the instrument, the more satisfying it will be to play. **AC**

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Kelly Joe Phelps



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Kelly Joe Phelps

Exploring the modern blues master's slide work in open tunings

BY PETE MADSEN

Kelly Joe Phelps is the total package. He's not just an excellent guitarist and singer, but a songwriter of depth and complexity. Prewar blues is just a stepping-off point for Phelps' intricate fingerpicking and soulful vocals; his guitar style is rooted in alternating-bass picking but extends far beyond, with a range of other syncopated approaches.

The depth of Phelps' musicianship perhaps owes to his unusual trajectory as a musician. Prior to becoming a blues-inspired fingerpicker, he was a bassist, heavily influenced by postbop and free jazz musicians like Ornette Coleman, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane.

Ever since his first recording, 1995's *Lead Me On*, Phelps has experimented with open tunings and slide techniques. He initially played lap style, in open D (low to high: D A D F# A D), but more recently has taken to playing bottleneck style (on a National Style O), in open G (D G D G B D).

In this lesson you'll adapt Phelps' open-D ideas to bottleneck style, with some examples inspired by "The House Carpenter" (from 1999's *Shine Eyed Mister Zen*). Then, you'll delve into

his open-G work with some figures like those heard on 2012's *Brother Sinner & The Whale*.

Because Phelps' playing flows so hypnotically, you can be lulled into thinking it's easier to play than it really is. So take your time in learning his techniques—highly useful bottleneck moves, regardless of your style.

OPEN-D TUNING

"The House Carpenter" is built around a classic alternating bass pattern on strings 6 and 4, taken at a brisk tempo of 225 bpm. When you play the single-string slide notes in **Example 1**, hold the slide low, just covering the strings you are playing.

Example 2 is similar to a lick from one of the many guitar breaks in "The House Carpenter." It stretches up to the 15th fret, which might be a bit of a reach for a bottleneck player, especially if your neck joins the body at the 12th fret. But it's fine to use your entire hand above the neck to make the occasional long reach with your slide.

Examples 3a and **3b** demonstrate two approaches to playing the same lick. Both examples use a double pull-off at the 15th fret,

produced with the slide. In **3a**, punctuate the lick with a double-stop at the 17th fret, but in **3b**, play the same notes without the slide, on string 2/fret 14 and string 3/fret 13—a position that's easier to access for most bottleneck players.

OPEN-G TUNING

Now switch to open G to explore a few examples inspired by *Brother Sinner & The Whale*. **Examples 4–8** are built from an alternating-bass backdrop on strings 5 and 4, and, occasionally, string 6. In **Example 4**, inspired by "Down to the Praying Ground," start out with your slide covering strings 1 and 2, landing on the flatted seventh (F#) on the "and" of beat 1. Then move to the third string and perform a backward slide.

The last two bars of Ex. 4 are based on what are open-C-type shapes in standard tuning, but which take on more colorful sounds in open G—namely C7, with the fifth (G) and then the flatted seventh (Bb in the bass, and Fmaj9, a sonority seldom heard in bottleneck blues. Start out bar 3 with your first and second fingers on strings 2 and 4, respectively, and keep these fingers held through the end of the next measure.



Tuning: D A D F# A D

Example 1
D7

with slide (all examples)

Example 2
D7

Example 3a
D7

Example 3b
D7

no slide

Tuning: D G D G B D

Example 4

G7 C7/G C7/Bb Fmaj9

no slide

Example 5
D C

no slide with slide

The instrumental “Spit Me Outta the Whale” is a showcase for Phelps’ behind-the-slide playing.

Example 5 begins with a series of hammer-ons played above an alternating-bass pattern. In the third bar, move to a C chord by placing your slide across fret 5. To access the third-fret F, lift the slide slightly away from string 1 and fret the F with your first finger. (Note: Phelps wears his slide on his fourth finger, which frees up his other fingers to fret notes behind the slide.)

Example 6 takes this idea one step further. Begin the figure with your slide across the top three strings at fret 5 and then slide up to fret 7. To nail the descending chromatic lines, from A to A \flat to G in bar 1 and from F \sharp to F \natural to E in bar 2, keep the slide in place and lift it slightly while you play the sixth- and fifth-fret notes with your second and first fingers, respectively. This is a tricky maneuver, so you’ll need to be patient in order to pull it off.

For the descending double-stop phrase in **Example 7**, remember to keep your slide low, just covering the strings you’re playing with the other fingers of your fretting hand behind the slide. In bar 3, your first and second

fingers should be in the perfect place to fret the double-stops on strings 2 and 3.

In “Talking to Jehovah,” the benchmark for **Example 8**, Phelps puts his own spin on the classic “Walking Blues” riff popularized by Delta blues players like Robert Johnson and Son House. Instead of a straight alternating bass line, he plays a slightly syncopated bass. Think of the F on string 6, fret 3, as falling into the G note played on the open string.

‘THE BLUE WHALE’

I’ve pieced together some of Phelps’ open-G ideas in a miniature I call “The Blue Whale” (**Example 9**)—a 14-bar I–IV–V blues in the key of G major. Start out on the I chord (G) with the slide covering strings 1–4 at fret 12. The phrases here wrap around an alternating bass with slide-based melody and a few notes played behind the slide. The slide covers four strings, which might sound a little odd as the fourth-string bass lands at the 12th fret. You could cover only three strings with the slide and use the open strings for the bass, but I find that makes behind-the-slide notes a little more difficult to play.

In bar 5, play the V chord (D) with the slide still covering four strings and just one note, the fifth-fret G on string 1, played behind the slide. It’s back to the I chord in bar 7, where you’ll do a little descent, from D to C to B, with the slide on string 1.

In the ninth measure, you’ll need to move your slide over one string to cover five strings for the C chord. Measures 11–12 use a descending phrase over the V chord, similar to Ex. 7, and the last phrase uses two double pull-offs and a hammer-on in resolving to the I chord. For the double pull-offs make sure to place both your first and second fingers down at the same time.

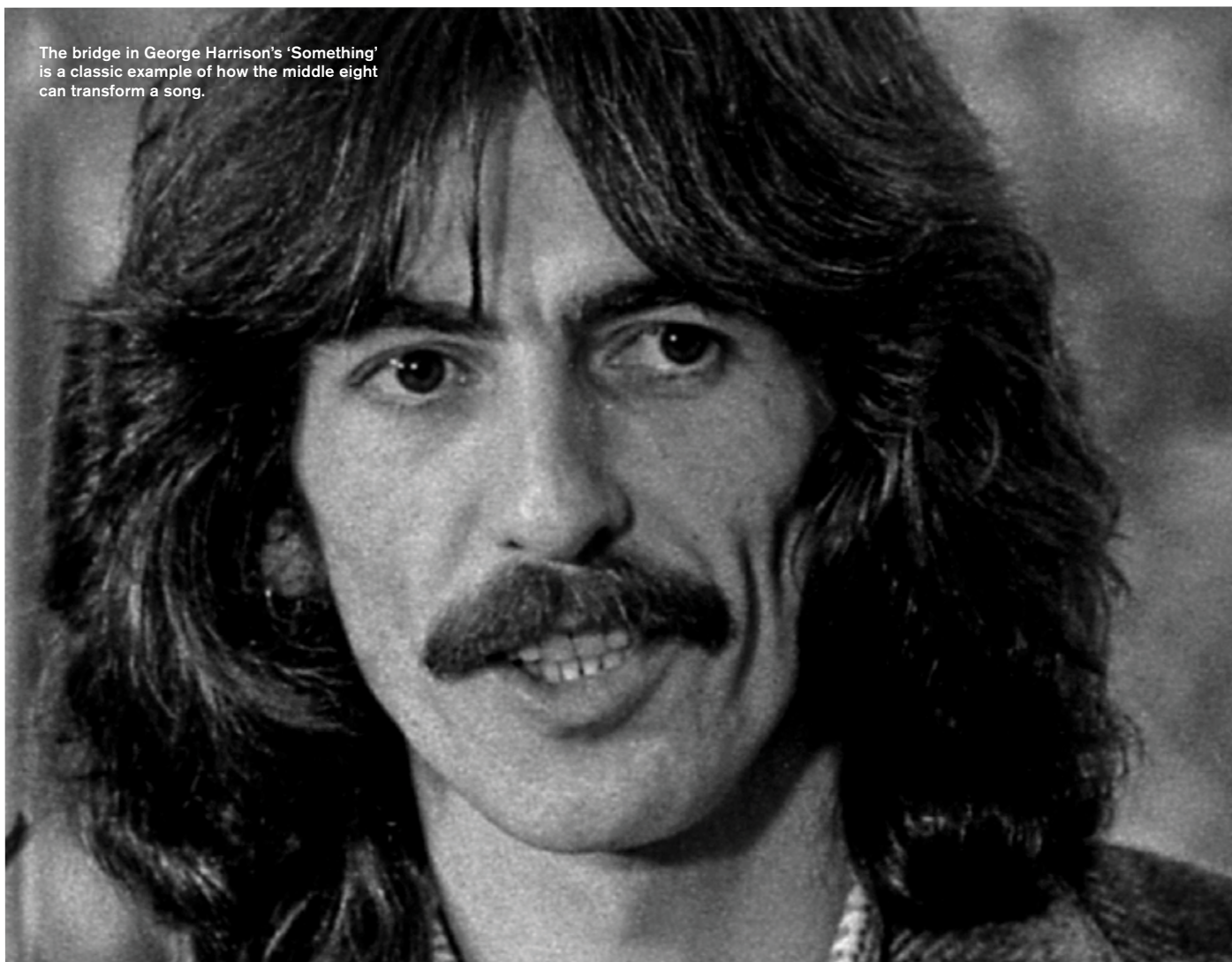
Once you’ve mastered “The Blue Whale,” try assimilating some of these ideas and techniques—especially the behind-the-slide stuff—in your own bottleneck work. You’ll be a deeper player for it.

Pete Madsen is a San Francisco Bay Area–based guitarist, author, and educator who specializes in acoustic blues, ragtime, and slide guitar. www.learnbluesguitarnow.com.



The poster for the Woodstock Invitational Luthiers Showcase features a vibrant, abstract background with a circular inset showing a landscape with mountains and a river. The text is bold and colorful, with a mix of fonts. At the top, it says "the WOODSTOCK Invitational LUTHIERS SHOWCASE" in large, stylized letters. To the right, the dates "OCT. 27, 28 & 29, 2017" are prominently displayed. Below the main title, the website "WWW.WOODSTOCKINVITATIONAL.COM" is listed. The central text reads "Fine Handmade Acoustic Guitars & Stringed Musical Instruments". Below this, it lists activities: "Show & Sale, Live Music, Special Exhibits, Vendors, Events, Instructional Clinics / Workshops, Concerts, Tonewood Festival". The location is given as "BEARSVILLE THEATER COMPLEX, WOODSTOCK, NEW YORK". At the bottom, there is a row of logos for sponsors and partners, including Acoustic Guitar, Bourgeois Guitars, D'Addario, Fishman, Guitar Maker, Martin & Co., PRS Guitars, and WAMC Northeast Public Radio.

The bridge in George Harrison's 'Something' is a classic example of how the middle eight can transform a song.



DAVID HUME KENNERLY

How to Write a Bridge

Build a strong transitional song section by studying classic examples

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Think of the timeless ballad “Something,” from the Beatles’ *Abbey Road*. In it, George Harrison muses on his lover’s allure over a wistful chord progression in the key of C. He sings a verse and loops back for another by way of the song’s signature guitar line, but the second time he lands not on a C chord, the I, but on an A major—a striking change, especially after the appearance of A minor a couple bars before. And with that, “Something” launches into another zone—it’s in a different key, with a new drum groove, harmony vocals enter (“You’re asking me will my love grow . . .”), the lyrics darken, and the melody soars above the

verse. The intensity and tension build . . . and then release as Harrison drops back into the original key of C, taking us out with a sweet guitar solo and a closing verse.

That dramatic departure in the middle—just eight bars long—is the bridge, also known as the middle eight. The bridge creates a welcome contrast to the repeating verse-chorus sections of a song, and is a short break about two-thirds of the way through that refreshes our ears for the ending. It’s not the centerpiece of the song—it doesn’t usually contain the hook or title—but often the bridge provides a great song with its most

sublime moments. Just think of the beautiful harmonic, melodic, and lyrical turns in the bridges in “Over the Rainbow” (“One day I wish upon a star . . .”), “Crazy” (“Worry, why do I let myself worry . . .”), or “Yesterday” (“Why she had to go . . .”).

For songwriters, the question is: How do you create these kinds of transporting moments in your own songs? As with everything in songwriting, there’s no formula for constructing a bridge, but taking a close look inside some classic songs can help you get started. Here are seven ideas to try, with examples from the pop and rock canon.

1 MOVE FROM THE I

In most songs, the verses and chorus center and resolve to the I chord—the tonic. A simple way to structure a bridge is to switch to another diatonic chord (a chord that occurs naturally in the song's key) and hold off fully resolving to the I until you return to the verse or chorus.

A common choice in a major key is to go to the IV or V chord in the bridge—you also might try the ii, iii, or vi. In a minor key, diatonic options include the IV or V (which could be major or minor), bIII, bVI, or bVII. (For more on how this number system works, see the *Acoustic Guitar* multimedia guide *Songwriting Basics for Guitarists* at store.AcousticGuitar.com.)

A straightforward example is the Grateful Dead's "Friend of the Devil," in which the bridge ("Got two reasons . . .") starts on the V—the song is in the key of G, and the V is a D chord. As shown in **Example 1**, the bridge hangs on the V and IV, only resolving to the I with the return to the verse.

In the Everly Brothers' "All I Have to Do Is Dream," written by Boudleaux Bryant, the bridge ("I could make you mine . . .") kicks off on the IV—an A in the song's key of E. For harmonic context, **Example 2** shows the last measure of the verse progression before going into the eight-bar bridge.

2 REACH OUTSIDE THE KEY

For a more attention-getting contrast in

a bridge, grab a non-diatonic chord—that is, a chord outside the key. That's what James Taylor does in the bridge in "Country Road" ("I guess my feet know . . ."). The song is in D major, but as shown in bar 2 of **Example 3**, he opens the bridge with a Dm7—a quick change in harmony that makes a big impact.

Another example is Simon and Garfunkel's "America," in which the bridge ("Laughing on the bus . . .") starts on a surprising Bbmaj7—the song is in C, so that's the non-diatonic bVIImaj7. (I'm disregarding the capo he used on the second fret and going by the shapes he uses, which raises the key to D.) Check it out in **Example 4**.

One good place to look for non-diatonic chords is in the parallel minor or major key, which has the same tonic root but a different set of chords. If the song is in a major key, for instance, you could borrow the i, bIII, bVI, or bVII from the parallel minor key for a cool contrast in the bridge.

3 CHANGE KEY

A bolder way to set the bridge apart is by modulating to another key—when you do this, the whole section feels like it has a different home chord. Here are a few possibilities, with examples from the Beatles songbook. One easy modulation is from a major key to its relative minor (vi), or from a minor key to its relative major (bIII). "We Can Work It Out," which is in D major, modulates to the relative minor (Bm) in the bridge ("Life is

AABA FORM

To get a handle on the function of the bridge, it's helpful to note that the term had a somewhat different meaning in the Tin Pan Alley era, when popular songs typically followed the 32-bar AABA form—the A sections are verses and B is the bridge. This form has no repeating chorus—the song's hook and title are found in the verses. "Something" is actually an AABA song (or, technically, AABAA, since there's a guitar solo over the verse progression before the closing verse), as are "Over the Rainbow" (with a coda added) and "Yesterday" (in which the bridge repeats, so it's AABABA).

Use of the AABA form diminished with the birth of rock 'n' roll and a shift toward emphasizing choruses. Songwriters continued to write bridges, of course, but often as part of larger structures, such as ABABCAB, in which A is the verse, B the chorus, and C the bridge. Though this form is longer, the bridge serves the same purpose—providing a break from the repetition and setting up the big finish.

Example 1

Example 1 shows three staves of music in G major. The first staff is labeled 'D' and 'C' above it, showing a progression of D major chords. The second staff is labeled 'D' above it, showing a progression of D major chords. The third staff is labeled 'Am', 'C', and 'D' above it, showing a progression of A minor, C major, and D major chords.

very short . . .”), as shown in **Example 5**, before returning to the happier sounding verse in D.

Another common modulation is to the parallel minor or major key. “While My Guitar Gently Weeps” does this, modulating from A minor in the verses to A major in the bridge (“I don’t know why . . .”). **Example 6** includes the C-to-E chord sequence that sets up the key change in the bridge. Similarly, in “Here, There, and Everywhere,” the verses are in G major, and then the bridge (“I want her everywhere . . .”) shifts to G minor. The new key center is less obvious because the bridge’s first chord is not Gm but B♭ (the ♭III). **Example 7** shows the progression behind this brief but stunning four-bar bridge.

The aforementioned Beatles’ “Something” makes a harmonic leap from C major in the verses to A major in the bridge. **Example 8** includes the turnaround chords that Harrison uses to transition into the new key for the bridge.

To make these kinds of modulations, you’ll

often need to use a pivot chord—a chord that works in both the old key and the new one. The V of the original key is a likely choice. All the Beatles modulations just mentioned (“We Can Work It Out,” “While My Guitar Gently Weeps,” “Here, There, and Everywhere,” and “Something”) use the V to help transition into the new key.

4 SHIFT REGISTER

On the melodic side, one way to create contrast in the bridge is by changing register—that is, the range of notes you’re using. In one of my all-time favorite bridges, from Paul Simon’s “Still Crazy After All These Years,” the bridge melody (starting with “Four in the morning”) soars noticeably higher than in the verse. This change, too, is coupled with a move to the non-diatonic II^maj7 chord—in this case, A^maj7 in the key of G.

The bridge melodies in several other songs already cited shift into a higher register too—in “Crazy,” “Friend of the Devil,” and “Something,” for example.

5 VARY THE PHRASING

To differentiate the bridge melody, you also might work with its phrasing. Try starting or ending the main phrases on a different beat than in the rest of the song. In “America,” for example, each phrase through the verse starts on beat 1, while in the bridge the first line (“Laughing on the bus . . .”) starts halfway through the measure—that space helps draw a listener’s attention.

You can enhance the contrast by changing up the rhythms and shape of the melody too. Consider “We Can Work It Out.” In contrast with the chipper verse, the bridge melody slows down and hangs on one note—a change that’s perfectly in-sync with the modulation to the minor key.

6 SWITCH UP THE GROOVE

Another way to set the bridge apart is by changing its whole rhythmic feel. Think of the bridge in Bill Withers’ “Ain’t No Sunshine,” in which the drums get funkier and the other instruments drop out—while

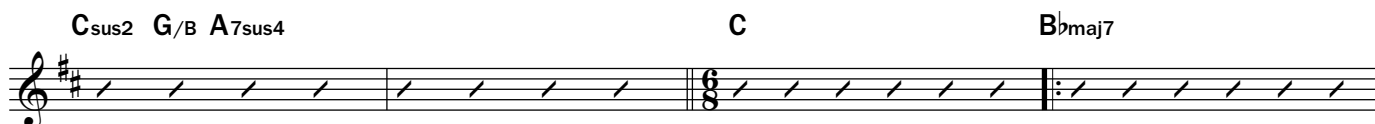
Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



Withers chants “I know” (26 times!). Then, after a quick break, the verse groove returns.

In the Beach Boys’ “Wouldn’t It Be Nice,” the drums drop out almost completely on the bridge (“Maybe if we think and wish and hope and pray . . .”), in keeping with the daydream-y lyrics and

A bridge should offer some kind of contrasting point of view to the song. . . . Try to look at the events or emotions in the song from another angle.

major-seventh-colored chord progression. And in the bridge of Don McLean’s “Vincent” (“For they could not love you . . .”), the tempo pauses on the lines “And when no hope was left inside / on that starry starry night”—the song’s dramatic climax.

7 SHIFT THE LYRICAL PERSPECTIVE

Along with all the musical changes, a bridge should offer some kind of contrasting point of view to the song. Don’t write words that simply continue the narrative in the verse or that recap the idea in the chorus. Try to look at the events or emotions in the song from another angle.

In the Grateful Dead’s “Truckin’,” for instance, the crowd-pleasing bridge (“Sometimes the light’s all shining on me . . .”) breaks from the song’s travelogue to ponder, famously, “. . . what a long strange trip it’s been.”

Sometimes the bridge brings a sort of catharsis, as in “Still Crazy,” in which the matter-of-fact reflections of the verses give way to the anguish of “Four in the morning / Crapped out, yawning / Longing my life away.” In the Police’s “Every Breath You Take,” the bridge (“Since you’ve gone . . .”) releases the emotions that seem like they’ve been suppressed in the verses—and a potent change to the ♭VI helps drive it home.

The bridge lyrics may even express an

idea or attitude counter to what’s in the verses. In “Something,” the bridge introduces questioning and doubt to a relationship that until then seemed blissful.

TO BRIDGE OR NOT TO BRIDGE

Of course not all songs need bridges—they may be better served with a simpler structure, and today’s pop charts are full of bridge-less songs. But when you’re working on a song and the cycle of verses and choruses starts to sound too predictable, a bridge may be just what the song doctor ordered. Make it different from the rest of the song, but still clearly connected—so it can transport the listener from one shore to another, providing a new view of the landscape along the way.

Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, Acoustic Guitar’s founding editor, is author of The Complete Singer-Songwriter, recently published in an expanded second edition, and the video series Learn Seven Grateful Dead Classics for Acoustic Guitar. jeffreypepperrodders.com



Example 5



Example 6



Example 7



Example 8



'American Tune'

A solo-guitar arrangement of a Paul Simon classic

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



Paul Simon

Paul Simon's 1973 hit "American Tune" evokes a sense of struggle and hard work that is at the core of the American experience, even referencing the Statue of Liberty. Yet, the song's roots are in Europe: It is based on a melody line from a chorale from J.S. Bach's sacred oratorio "St. Matthew Passion."

This solo-guitar arrangement has its origins in one of the most American of cities: New Orleans, a community that has faced its share of hardship. In October of 2015, producer Joe Henry invited Adam Levy—an *AG* contributing writer and ace singer-songwriter and sideman—to play the song on a recording session for New Orleans jazz and R&B piano legend Allen Toussaint's album *American Tunes* (Nonesuch). "In advance of the session, I didn't know what the arrangement or instrumentation would be," Levy recalls. "I knew only

that Toussaint would be singing the song in the key of C—same as Paul Simon's original."

Levy did his best to cop Simon's original part, as it's integral to the song. But for a different sound than Simon, who used a steel-string guitar on the original recording, Levy brought a nylon-string Guild to the session. The arrangement came together quickly. "We tracked Toussaint's vocal live, along with my guitar, and bass and drums," he says. "It was so thrilling to hear nothing but Toussaint's smoky-sweet voice in my headphones as we tracked the first verse and chorus of the song."

"When the rest of the band came in, it added to the drama of his vocal performance and perfectly underscored Simon's lyrics. Toussaint tracked his piano part after we got a vocal take that he was pleased with."

Sadly, Toussaint died a month later, while on tour in Europe, before he could hear the finished results.

Levy's part, transcribed here, is a study in sensitive accompaniment. He tends to play just two of the upper voices of each chord and slightly palm mutes the bass notes, offering plenty of sonic space for Toussaint's vocals. The song's harmonic rhythms—the rate at which its chords change—are not as straightforward as in the typical pop song. Some measures have as many as four different chords, and then there are some sneaky time-signature changes, from 4/4 to 2/4 in bars 19 and 31, and from 4/4 to 5/4 in bar 34. Maintaining a consistent pulse throughout is key, so take things slowly and use a metronome if needed to master this great American tune. **AC**



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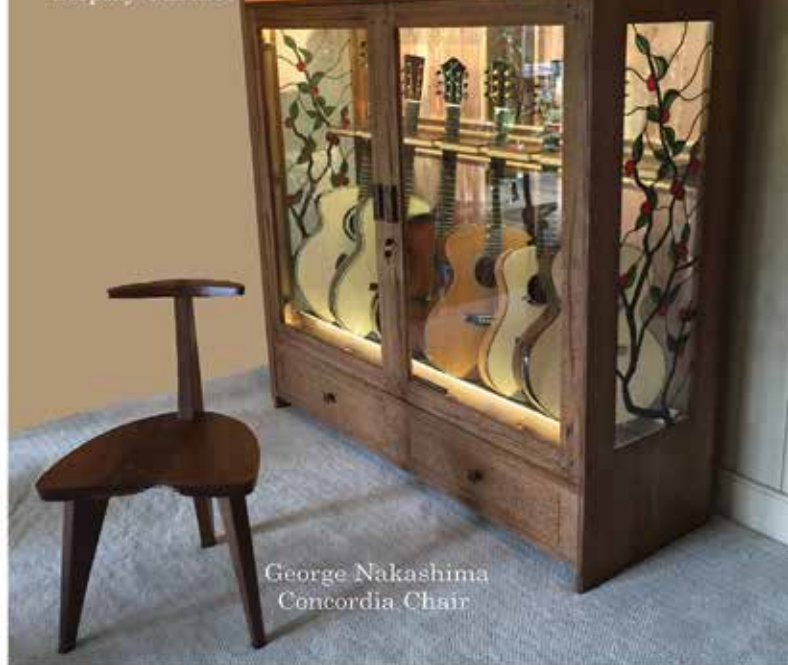
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Intro

Verse

C

1. Man-y is the time I've been mis-tak - en. And
 2., 3. See additional lyrics
 4. Instrumental till bar 11

let ring throughout fingerstyle

Am E7 Am C F C G C G G/B C Bdim7

man-y times con-fused. ____ Yes and I've of-ten felt for - sak-en and

Am E7 Am C9 F G F C

cer-tain - ly ____ mis - used. ____ Oh, but I'm al - right, I'm al - right. I'm
 4. See additional lyrics

F C G E Am A7 D7 G Am G/B C G D

just wear - y to ____ my ____ bones. ____ Still, you don't ex-pect to be bright and bon ____ vi-vant.

To Coda 

17 **G C F C G E7 E7/G# Am Dm7 C/G G13**

So far a - way from home. So far a - way from home.

21 **C**

1 2

2. I don't know a And I dreamed I was dy - in'.

Bridge C

25 **G G#dim7 Am Ebdim7**

I dreamed that my soul rose un - ex - pect - ed - ly, look - ing back down

28 **G7 F C G C G C/G G G7 C**

at me, and smiled re - as - sur - ing - ly. I dreamed I was fly - ing.

31 **G** **Am** **E^bdim7**

High up a - bove my eyes could clear - ly see the Sta - tue of Lib - er -

34 **G7** **F** **G C/G** **G7** **C** **D.S. al Coda**
(take repeat)

ty sail - ing a - way to sea. Dreamed I was fly - ing. 3. But we come on a

Coda

38 **C** **G7** **C** **G** **F** **C** **G** **C**

2. I don't know a soul who's not been battered
I don't have a friend who feels at ease
I don't know a dream that's not been shattered
Or driven to its knees
Oh, but it's alright, it's alright
For we've lived so well so long
Still when I think of the road we're trav'ling on
I wonder what's gone wrong
I can't help it, I wonder what's gone wrong
3. But we come on the ship they call the Mayflower
We come on the ship that sailed the moon
We come in the age's most uncertain hours
And sing an American tune
Oh, it's alright, it's alright, it's alright
You can't be forever blessed
Still tomorrow's goin' to be another working day
And I'm tryin' to get some rest
But that's all I'm tryin' to get some rest
4. It's alright, it's alright, it's alright
You can't be forever blessed
Still tomorrow's goin' to be another working day
And I'm tryin' to get some rest
That's all I'm tryin' to get some rest

'Y'all Means All'

A recent song by John McCutcheon boasts accompaniment work worthy of close study

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



John McCutcheon

In March of 2016, the state of North Carolina introduced its House Bill 2 (HB2)—a controversial piece of legislation, a.k.a. “bathroom bill,” which codified public facility use based on one’s birth gender. In response, the singer-songwriter John McCutcheon penned “Y’all Means All.” The law has since been repealed, and McCutcheon has made this song of warm inclusiveness a staple of his repertoire.

“Y’all Means All” is in double-drop-D tuning—strings 1 and 6 are each lowered a whole step, to D from E. McCutcheon originally encountered the tuning years ago when recovering from an table-saw accident that

temporarily limited him to using only two fretting fingers. He still uses it, apparently in large part to get a big sound on D-type chords.

McCutcheon plays “Y’all Means All” with a full band on his most recent album, *Trolling for Dreams*, but the transcription here is based on the solo version from his recent *AG Sessions* video. As is clearly seen, McCutcheon plays the tune with a thumb pick, which affords him textural variety: full-bodied strums with the pick and rolling arpeggios with the fingers.

The accompaniment patterns in “Y’all Means All” have an improvisatory feel—McCutcheon plays slight variations

throughout—and the transcription will give you a good sense of the breadth of his approach. There are harmonic subtleties as well. McCutcheon takes advantage of the open strings to add color to certain A chords, for instance; string 2 (B) is the ninth and string 1 (D) the fourth.

Also check out the way that McCutcheon’s guitar interacts with his vocals. His accompaniment is less active during the key phrase “Y’all means all,” for instance. This kind of textural awareness—in concert with an ear for harmonic color—lends depth and complexity to McCutcheon’s music. **AG**

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Y'ALL MEANS ALL

BY JOHN MCCUTCHEON

Tuning: D A D G B D

Intro

Verse

1. I re-mem - ber back, I was eight or nine.

at my grand-ma's house, in the sum-mer-time. — Ev-'ry night at

six. I'd hear her sweet, slow — drawl, — "Y'all come in, y'all means

— all. 2. I might not like you; you might not like —
3., 4. See additional lyrics

Verse
Guitar cont. sim.

13 **Aadd⁴₉** **A** **Bm** **A** **G5**

me. Some - times that's ____ just the way things ____ are gon - na be. Still I'll

16 **D/F#** **Aadd⁴₉** **A** **G5** **Aadd4** **D5** **D/F#**

catch you if you ____ should fall. And where I come from, y'all means ____ all. Blood is ____

Chorus

20 **G5** **D/F#** **G5** **D5**

____ blood and bone is ____ bone. Kin is ____ kin ____ and home is ____

3 0 0 3 2 0 3 3 3 0 3 2 0 3 2 0 3 0

5 4 4 4 5 4 4

23 **Aadd⁴₉** **A** **D** **D/F#** **G5** **D/F#**

____ home. There ain't no dif - f'rence I can re - call ____ that makes a dif -

0 0 5 3 3 3 0 0 3 3 3 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 7 6 7 6 7 0 0 0 0 0 0 5 5 4

26 **D6** **A5** **To Coda** **1** **D5** **G/D** **D5**

f'rence. Y'all means ____ all. 3. It's a South - ern ____

0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

4 2 4 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

2 **Bridge**

D5 **Bm(add4)** **A** **D/A** **A**

all. I've heard it said 'round these parts we've got our

G5 **D/F#** **Aadd⁴₉** **A** **B5**

trou- bles, but we've got hearts. And at this ta - ble, there is a chair

A **D/A** **A** **G** **D/F#** **Aadd⁴₉** **A** **D.S. al Coda**

— where you're al - ways wel - come. Set your - self down there. 4. Though we are not

Coda

D5 **G/D** **D5** **Outro**

all. In your Bir - ken - stocks or your o - ver - alls,

41

A^{add4} A G⁵ A^{add4} D⁵ G/D D⁵ *play three times*

— bless your hearts. Y'all means — all.

*Sung first time only.

3. It's a Southern thing
It's simple etiquette
You treat folks kindly
But sometimes folks forget
They can act plumb mean
Neanderthal
But like my Grandma said
Y'all means all

4. Though we are not perfect
But we know it's true
We're all God's children
We are just me and you
And one day soon
We'll hear the call
Y'all come in
And y'all means all

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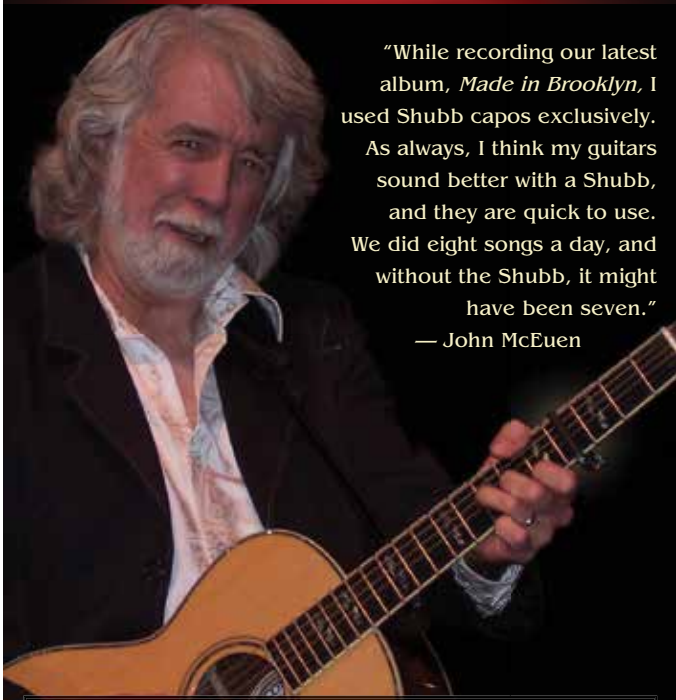


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'Keep the River on Your Right'

Tom Heyman adds color to a basic chord progression

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Tom Heyman's "Keep the River on Your Right"—not to be confused with the Jonatha Brooke song of the same name—is a study in how making slight modifications to a pretty stock harmonic sequence can make it sound more colorful.

The arrangement here splits the difference between the San Francisco-based singer-songwriter's studio version, from 2014's *That Cool Blue Feeling*, and an informal duo rendition he played with his pal Dan Stuart when they stopped by AG's studios to film a *Sessions* video. (If you'd like to play along with the latter, keep in mind that the guitars are both tuned down by a half step).

The music for the intro, verse, and interlude progression, which forms the bulk of the song, is shown here in notation and tablature. The details that add color are an Fmaj7 chord instead of an F chord, and a Dadd4/9 chord, sitting in for a plain old D. The Dadd4/9 is formed by moving a basic open C-chord grip up two frets; the open first and third strings are the ninth (E) and fourth (G), respectively. Not only is it more efficient to switch between Dadd4/9–C than D–C, it sounds cooler, too.

Another detail to note: on the studio version, in the main progression, the electric bass plays an E under the C chord. If you'd

like to do the same, just add your open sixth string to the open-C grip.

Heyman—incidentally, playing a Harmony H1260 Sovereign—shares guitar duties with Rusty Miller on the album. In the outro, Miller plays arpeggios in standard tuning while Heyman works in Nashville tuning (in which strings 6–3 are replaced with thinner strings, tuned an octave above standard). Though either of these parts, shown here in notation, stands nicely on its own, their sum is more harmonically and texturally compelling: a handy trick when it comes to arranging for two guitars. **AG**



Tom Heyman



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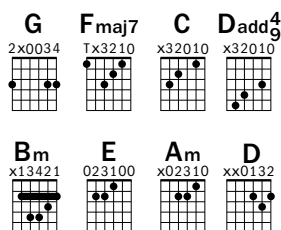
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Basic Strumming Pattern



Basic Strumming Pattern

1-3 Fmaj7 C 4 D6add4 C

*strum: □ □ V □ V □ V etc.

* □ = down; V = up

Outro Parts (Played Simultaneously)

Outro Parts (Played Simultaneously)

Guitar 1: G5 Fsus2 C

Guitar 2 (Nashville tuning): G F9 C9

Intro

G Fmaj7 C (x3)
G Dadd4/9 C

- Keep the river on your right
Keep the river on your right
Keep the river on your right as you navigate the night

- And it's a mystery to me
It's such a mystery to me
It's a mystery to me
We treat our love so carelessly

Bridge

Bm E Am
There's beauty in this strange and desperate world
D G
It'll take the measure of us all
Bm E Am
And you was such a beautiful young girl
Dadd4/9 C
We stood together true and tall

Interlude

G Fmaj7 C
G Dadd4/9 C

- You got to have a heart of steel
You got to have a heart of steel
You got to have a heart of steel
Keep your shoulder to the wheel
- And you wear it on your sleeve
Yeah you wear it on your sleeve
You wear it on your sleeve enough to make a man believe

Bridge

I got no stories left that I can tell
No second chance no brand new start
I know they say you can't un-ring a bell
But baby won't you please un-break this heart

Interlude (use Intro progression)

- All the little souls
All the little souls
Gone off to paradise
While we stay here and we get old
- So keep the river on your right
Yeah keep the river on your right
Keep the river on your right as you navigate the night

Outro

G Fsus2 C (repeat and fade)



GRETCHEN WENNER

Old Souls

Kathy Wingert reveals her unlikely path to lutherie and how vintage instruments have inspired her

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

On a Sunday last June, I couldn't help but notice a strange wooden creation resting on a purple towel on Kathy Wingert's workbench. It was the rough and elongated soundboard of a harp guitar, the historic instrument that Wingert and a select cohort of modern luthiers have been revisiting in recent years. "When a client first asked me to make a harp guitar, probably around 2007, I thought it was crazy, just an insane fad. But now I've made a bunch and figured out how to keep them from folding over time—so far, at least," Wingert said, laughing.

We were in the clean room of her shop, where she attends to the aspects of guitar construction that produce the least amount of sawdust. It's tucked within her classic suburban ranch home in Rancho Palos Verdes, a coastal town in Los Angeles County. A pair of parakeets chattered incessantly in their cage as I checked out four guitar necks hanging on a wall. One of them, as it happened, was a new part for an old

guitar. "A very nice client told me that he was never really happy with the neck on his instrument, and that he didn't know how to articulate what he wanted when he originally purchased the guitar from me," Wingert said. "I said, 'Quit fussing, send me the guitar back, and I'll give you exactly the neck you want.'"

Wingert is one of the great modern luthiers, celebrated for the sonic and constructional artistry of her steel-string acoustics, of which she makes 10 or fewer per year. She was a relative latecomer to luthiery—mothering was her full-time job for many years before she found this calling. But Wingert has been a guitar player for most of her life. She intended to pursue a musical education after high school, but became disillusioned by the quality of instruction at her school. "I started out at one of my local community college, and this being the '70s, they really didn't know what to do with me and my steel-string. So I just started picking

out things quietly on my own, by ear—and years later it's pretty much the same story."

Though she says she's never been a gear head, in the 1970s Wingert began buying guitars through local classified ads, sprucing them up, and enjoying them for a while before selling them for a profit. At that point, she didn't really get into any heavy lifting in terms of repair work, but always left the instruments better than she found them. "I learned to finesse the finishes and do a little setup work. I taught myself how to do light fretwork using my grandfather's sharpening stone; it wasn't hard to figure out that a buzzing fret needed to come down."

One day in the mid-1990s, Wingert found herself in a public library, wondering what to do with herself. She happened upon a guitar-making book and was intrigued. After digging into that tutorial, she checked out every other book she could find at her local library and

before long had amassed a body of knowledge about instrument building. “One morning I woke up and realized that if you took all the books away, I could actually make a guitar,” Wingert says. “But I actually ended up roasting marshmallows on some of my earliest guitars.”

Wingert really cut her teeth as a repair tech and luthier in the mid-1990s, when, on the strength of a couple of her early instruments, she took a gig at the World of Strings in Long Beach, California. The owner, Jon Peterson, was the go-to repairman for all of the heavyweight upright bassists in the Los Angeles area. (The shop closed in 2013, but Peterson continues to do repair work.) “Jon was instrumental in helping me see the guitar in the long term,” Wingert says. “He always put me on repairs of the oldest instruments and some of the most damaged things. I believe he was picking things that would teach me a lesson.”

At the time of my visit, Wingert had taken on an intense project outside of luthiery, having brought a Berger Blanc Suisse into her home. She needed to check on the puppy and so we walked into a sun-filled living room, where he was intently watching news coverage of the Orlando nightclub shooting. The centerpiece of an adjacent den was a wall-mounted trio of three recent Wingert guitars, including a very cool-looking steel-string, the headstock of which was embellished with tiny gold rivets and gears beneath the surface. “That was a fun departure for me. It was inspired by some steampunk furniture I saw a few years back,” Wingert explained.

We walked back into the clean room, where Wingert pointed out a corner workspace stocked with supplies and tools for creating the dazzling inlay art that some customers request on their instruments. She’s entrusted this delicate handwork to one of her daughters, Jimmi Wingert, since 2003. “I had become pretty disillusioned with the amount of time I was spending alone on guitar making, and I don’t think I would’ve made it this far if Jimmi didn’t work here,” the luthier said. “Not only is she an amazing artist, she has the amazing ability to work with clients and really understand what they’re trying to capture.”

“In the beginning, there was nothing scarier than working on a guitar that had so many hours invested in it already,” Jimmi Wingert later told me via email. “Even though I didn’t want to build guitars, I’m so happy I was lured into the field of creating for other people... I really enjoy being able to interpret what someone wants, even when they can’t quite explain it.”

Wingert wasn’t going to show me the other section of her workshop, formerly the house’s

two-car garage, claiming it was not presentable. But she changed her mind and led me into this area where she makes lots of sawdust. Here were all her jigs, fixtures, and power tools—in fact tidily arranged—as well as her stashes of tonewoods. Like many guitar makers, she prefers to work with woods in the spruce and rosewood families. “Some of my woods are easily from the 1960s and earlier, and they get to be pretty well seasoned and stable in here,” Wingert said.

Back in the clean room on my way out, I noticed an antique case that looked out of place

among the high-end modern models that come with Wingert’s guitars. I asked to see what was inside and Wingert pulled out a 1930s Gibson tenor guitar, explaining that she still takes on the occasional repair—if she finds it compelling enough. The top of the tenor had been worn through the wood and covered up with a bolt-on pickguard. Wingert had just finished restoring the soundboard with a graft and a color match that made the repair difficult to detect. “These beautiful old instruments have taught me so much about my own guitar making,” she said.

AG

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How Important is a Loose Bridge?

If your guitar isn't playing or feeling right, check for a loose bridge

BY MAMIE MINCH

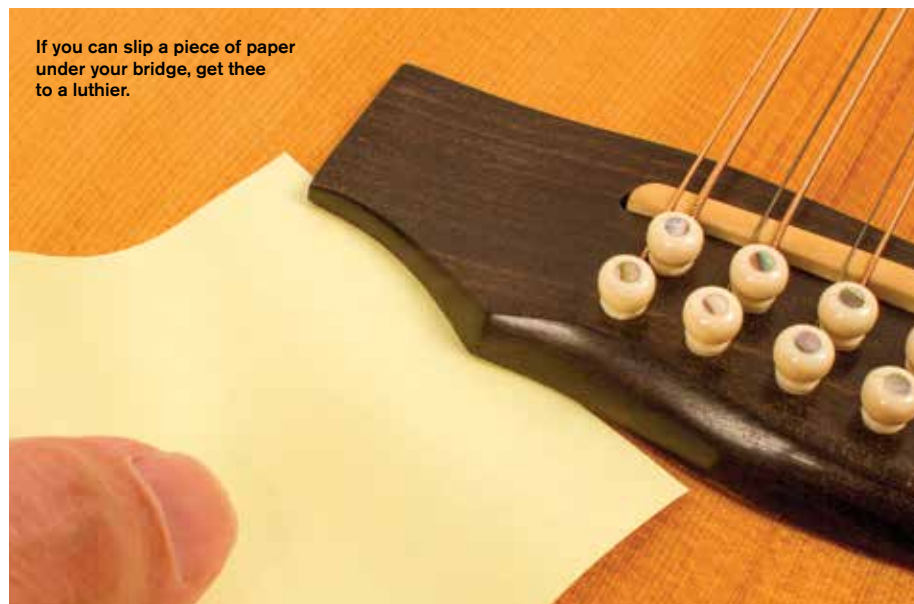
Q: Over the last few months, the action on my older Yamaha dreadnought has gotten uncomfortably high up the neck. I brought it into the repair shop for what I expected to be a setup, but there was apparently an issue that I hadn't anticipated. I was told it could use some setup work, but more importantly, it needs a bridge reglue. My bill is a lot higher than I thought it would be and the turnaround time is longer. I just wanted the action to be lower! I'm feeling disillusioned and quite a bit poorer than I thought I would feel. What happened?

—Steven, New York City

A: From where I'm standing behind the bench, I see lots of clients go through something similar. They think all they need is a simple fix—a setup, a little truss rod tweak—only to hear a more complicated story when they get to the repair shop. Of course, unexpected repair bills are always a bitter pill to swallow, but there are some good reasons to take care of certain issues as they arise.

Let's talk about your bridge for a moment. Under the bridge is a glue joint that covers quite a bit of real estate—this big, strong joint is really working hard for your guitar. You can think about your bridge on the top, and your bridge plate inside the guitar, directly under it, as two slices of bread in a spruce sandwich. The bridge plate and the bridge do lots of jobs—stabilize and stiffen the area, strengthen around the bridge-pin holes, spread the tensile load, and help direct vibration to the right places on the soundboard.

When a bridge pulls up in the face of 200 pounds of string tension over years, it's generally along the back edge or one of the back corners. This shrinks the size of the glue joint, and now the torque exerted on the guitar is uneven. Without the added support of a good bridge glue-joint, the top could be



more likely to belly or yank upward, and distort or stretch like fabric. Also, because the joint is not solid, the string vibration has a less direct path to the soundboard. This means your guitar can sound noticeably worse: thinner, quieter, and deadier. While the changes in sound might happen slowly, it's often clear exactly what you were missing when you get your guitar back in one piece to find that it sounds much more like itself.

When a luthier notices before you do that your bridge is pulling up, count yourself lucky! If this problem goes on for long enough to be easily noticeable, it can be harder to fix. The top may get distorted, the bridge itself might cup and need to be replaced, and you could have to suffer while your guitar sounds worse than it should. If you want to check your own guitar, try slipping the corner of a Post-it note under the back edge or back corners. If it disappears under the bridge, make an appointment with your luthier.

Here's the good news: This is a very doable repair and something guitar repair shops handle every day. They'll remove the entire bridge, clean away any old glue, and clamp the bridge back down with some fresh glue. If the top and the bridge are healthy, this is a great joint to use hot hide glue on; hide glue is crystalline and hard for maximum transference of vibration, and it doesn't creep. If your luthier finds some unexpected damage under the bridge—which certainly happens—she might choose another glue with better gap-filling properties.

It sounds like even though you didn't get the news you wanted from your repairperson, they did the right thing in telling you to take care of your bridge. And you did the right thing for your guitar by taking the advice.

Mamie Minch is the co-owner of Brooklyn Lutherie and an active blues player. She is the former head of repair at Retrofret Guitars.



Mamie Minch

GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or a topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* repair expert Mamie Minch.

Send an email titled "Repair Expert" to Senior Editor Greg Olwell at greg.olwell@stringletter.com, and he'll forward it to Mamie.

If AG selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of AG's *The Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.

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Martin's CEO 8.2 Grand Jumbo

A smart new jumbo designed by Martin CEO Christian Frederick Martin IV

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It's a bit disorienting to open a new shipping box emblazoned with Martin logos, only to find a silver hardshell case that looks like something out of the Space Age. And once inside that case, I didn't find the usual OM or dreadnought, but a round-shouldered, jumbo-sized guitar with a flared headstock and green keystone-style tuning machines.

On one hand, the instrument in question—the new CEO 8.2—is one of Martin's more curious departures. But on the other hand, a few introductory strums and runs show that the guitar is consistent with the company's longstanding ethos of building guitars with a rich, clear sound, that are sure to appeal to players of all stripes. And, and it's nicely built.

A LOVING TRIBUTE

The CEO 8.2 (and the CEO 8.2E, which adds a Fishman Blackstack pickup) is the latest in a line of guitars designed by Martin's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Chris Martin. (It replaces the now-discontinued CEO 8.) While the CEO 7 derived inspiration from Gibson's L-00 (which was, itself, an adaptation of an earlier Martin design), the 8.2 is more like an SJ-200—Gibson's flagship jumbo guitar.

That's not to say that the CEO 8.2 is a slavish imitation, though. The CEO 8.2 has a mahogany neck, back, and sides; Martin's modern belly-shaped ebony bridge; and an unbound ebony fingerboard; compared to Gibson's maple body, rosewood fingerboard and moustache bridge; and binding on the fingerboard and headstock. Specs aside, the CEO 8.2 feels more like a loving tribute than a copy.

In any case, the review model is built from a nice set of woods. The fine-grained European spruce top has received Martin's VTS (Vintage Tone System); it's been torrefied, or baked in a controlled environment, such that it behaves like the old wood that some players covet. The back and sides are lovely straight-grained mahogany. All of the woods are FSC-certified—that is, they are recognized as sustainably harvested by the Forest Stewardship Council—reflecting Martin's commitment to the environment.

The CEO 8.2 feels like a whole lot of guitar. And it's got a voice to match.

Like all the other recent Martins I've gotten to know, the CEO 8.2 boasts superb craftsmanship all round. The frets are smoothly crowned, polished, and buzz-free, thanks to a PLEK (computerized fret leveling) treatment.

BIG GUITAR, BIG SOUND

The CEO 8.2's mahogany neck has Martin's Modified Low Oval shape with a High Performance Taper, meaning, simply, that it's slim and gets narrower at the 12th fret than on a traditional neck. It's sleek and fast and it's just as easy to play barre chords up and down the neck as it is to play speedy single-note lines.





Based on Martin's Grand Jumbo 14-fret body (the same basic shape as the company's briefly offered CF-1 and CF-2 archtops offered in the mid-2000s), the CEO 8.2 feels like a whole lot of guitar. And it's got a voice to match. The guitar has plenty of volume and projection, with strong fundamentals and subtle overtones. Its sound is warm and balanced, with tight bass notes and singing trebles—and without the mushiness sometimes associated with jumbo guitars.

Its generous amount of overhead is an asset when it comes to basic strumming duties. The CEO 8.2 responds very well when played with a pick, with single-note flat-picked lines

having a robust presence and definition.

When fingerpicked gently in standard tuning, as well as DADGAD and open G, there's a rich roundness to the notes; when attacked more aggressively, an attractive grittiness. Like many other large bodied guitars, this CEO 8.2 isn't quite as responsive to picking-hand nuances as some smaller-bodied guitars are, but it certainly gets the job done.

In the new CEO 8.2, Martin has successfully synthesized some ideas from one of its main competitors, Gibson, in a cool new design of its own. With excellent playability and a brilliant voice, the CEO 8.2 should prove a solidly reliable companion—and a sustainably built one at that. **AC**

MARTIN CEO 8.2

BODY Grand J 14-fret size body with solid European spruce top with VTS (Vintage Tone System) treatment; solid mahogany back and sides; ebony bridge with compensated bone saddle and 2-5/32" string spacing; satin finish with bourbon sunset burst top and dark mahogany back and sides

NECK Mahogany neck with 20-fret ebony fretboard; Mother-of-pearl skeleton diamond inlays; 25.4" scale; 1-3/4" bone nut; nickel enclosed-gear tuners with green keystone plastic buttons; satin finish

EXTRAS Martin Retro Medium/Light-LJ's Choice (MLJ13) strings (.013–.056); Liquidmetal bridge pins; TKL Alumin-X hardshell case

PRICE \$3,999 list/\$3,159 street

Made in USA, martinguitar.com



Journey OF660 Carbon-Fiber Travel Guitar

More than just a travel guitar, this axe is ready for musical voyages

BY PETE MADSEN

With composite construction and easily detachable neck, the Journey OF660 is truly a guitar you can take anywhere. Whether in extreme cold, heat, or moisture (high- or low-humidity), carbon fiber is impervious to the elements. What this means, for you the player, is that the guitar will not warp or swell. And because it folds up into a tidy TSA-approved case, it will fit into the overhead compartment of most airplanes. The case even has a pocket large enough for your laptop or other sundry items.

Assembling the guitar is simple. The body and neck store in separate pouches within the

case, but are still attached together by the strings. Once removed from the case, simply slot the neck into a channel in the body with two posts—a triangular one and a screw post that you will tighten once the neck has clicked into place. Pull back on the neck until you here the “click,” and then tighten the inner screw by hand, from the back of the guitar. I had to fiddle with the attachment screw a little to get the action where I wanted it; the action might be a bit high if you don’t twist the screw enough. (To disassemble, you will need to loosen the back screw, and then push the black

button at the heel to release the neck from the body.) The small headstock saves room, but may be a bit uncomfortable for bigger hands when tuning or retuning. More than likely, you will need to tune the guitar once the neck is attached, but then you are ready to rock!

Once assembled, the Journey is 12-1/2-inches wide and 35-1/2-inches long, making it slightly smaller than a traditional 0-size. It sports a 24-1/2-inch scale, and a scooped upper bout, rather than a cutaway, which allows finger access to the 20th fret. I enjoyed the playability of the carbon-fiber neck. The soft C-shaped neck



is easy to navigate and I was able to fret chords up and down the neck with proper intonation, though the action is a bit high beyond the 10th fret, even with the adjustments mentioned above. I tried out a bit of Eric Clapton's "Layla," with the neck feeling solid and capable under my hands. The Journey also felt good for solos, using bends, hammer-ons, and pull-offs.

The Journey is a testament to carbon fiber's ability to be molded with nice bevels and contours. Thanks to the body's wedge shape, the Journey fits snugly against your body and the bevel on the lower bass bout provided a nice rest for your picking/strumming arm.

TRAVELING TONES

The acoustic timbre of the Journey is distinct. A strong hearty bass thumps out at you from the soundport located on the upper bout. The treble has less sparkle than a wood guitar, but I got a feel for how to attack the strings and how to navigate its very interesting sound palette once I became familiar with the Journey's sound.

I got a real sense of the Journey's chunky midrange and almost metallic growl when I fingerpicked my way through a couple of early blues tunes, (Robert Johnson's "From Four Until Late" and Big Bill Broonzy's "Shuffle Rag").

Next, I retuned the Journey to open-D tuning (D A D F# A D) and played some slide guitar. One benefit of the attachable neck is that I can vary the string height (action), by tightening or

loosening the back screw. I play a lot of slide guitar and this is a very cool, if unintended, feature. Anyone who has attempted playing slide guitar knows that guitars with low action are challenging. I played Tampa Red's "Boogie Woogie Dance" and couple of my originals, enjoying the elevated action and general ease of slide played over the entire fretboard.

The Journey is also equipped with a proprietary passive undersaddle pickup. I plugged into a Fishman Loudbox Mini and was able to replicate the guitar's acoustic tone fairly accurately, with some slight adjustments made to

the bass and treble on my amp (treble a little above 12 o'clock, and bass a little below 12 o'clock). There are no onboard volume or tone controls, so if you plan on gigging with the Journey, you might want an outboard preamp/DI box for more control over your sound.

Travelers and gigging musicians should find the Journey a great companion, whether tucked in the overhead or riding shotgun in a compact car. It's easy to assemble and covers all the bases for performance and practicing. While it doesn't have the same acoustic timbre of a wood guitar, its unique voice has its own attributes. **AG**

JOURNEY OF660

BODY 0-size 14-fret body with unidirectional carbon-fiber top and fiberglass/carbon-fiber hybrid back and sides, offset soundhole, scoop-style cutaway, carbon-fiber bracing, gloss polyurethane finish, carbon-fiber bridge with compensated bone saddle

NECK Removable C-shaped carbon-fiber neck and 20-fret fingerboard, 16" radius, 24-1/2" scale, 1-3/4" bone nut, Grover tuners

Electronics Passive undersaddle transducer pickup

EXTRAS Padded travel case (22"x14"x 9"); Elixir Phosphor-Bronze Lights

PRICE \$1,199 (street)

Made in China, journeyinstruments.com

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Recording King Dirty 30's RPS-7 and RPS-9

Affordable guitars with great vintage vibe

BY PETE MADSEN

I picked up the Recording King Dirty 30's RPS-7 and RPS-9, not expecting much on account of their modest price tags. But an hour later I'm like, "What happened?" I can't believe how much fun I'm having with these little troublemakers.

While there's much to be said for the refined kind of playing that a fancy, high-end guitar can inspire, a bargain option can also be a good muse. You can pick up an inexpensive instrument and toss it around without even thinking about it; you can play it with abandon, not worrying about babying the thing, and this can be a setup for some magical moments.

A pair of new guitars by Recording King—the California-based company that pays homage to Depression-era fretted instruments—definitely fits the bill for fun and easy-to-play bargains.

VINTAGE STYLING

The RPS-7 and RPS-9 are modeled after Dust Bowl-era Montgomery Ward guitars, and they share some basic specs: Each guitar has a compact, style-0-sized body with a 12th-fret neck junction and a relatively long-scale fretboard, 25.4 inches. The price difference reflects the use of a solid Sitka spruce top on the RPS-9, versus laminated spruce on the RPS-7.

Both guitars have a cool old-school vibe with their Tobacco Sunburst-finished tops. Interestingly, although the RPS-7 is the less expensive guitar, it looks fancier, having checkered purfling and stenciled, fragmented fretboard inlays. With no purfling and simple dot fretboard markers, the RPS-9 is plainer, but smart looking.

The workmanship on both is impressively good and consistent—especially considering these prices. Neither guitar has any over- or under-spray, nor, most important, their frets are cleanly dressed, with no sharp edges.



RPS-7



RPS-9

EFFORTLESSLY PLAYABLE

Both the RPS-7 and the RPS-9 have slim necks with relatively narrow nuts (1-11/16-inches) that will be good fits for all hand sizes, and definitely ideal for beginning students. When I play either guitar, my fingers fly from the nut to the 12th fret, and I don't break a sweat. I miss the access to higher frets, but luckily, there are some good 14-fret 000 and dreadnought options in the Dirty 30's series.

On the RPS-7, I fingerpick my way through Tampa Red's "Boogie Woogie Dance" in open-E tuning (low to high: E B E G# B E) with some bottleneck slide. The guitar sounds great; with a quick attack and decay that lends a rough-edged vintage character. Normally, for finger-picking, I prefer a chunkier and wider neck, but each guitar has adequate room on the fretboard—and in the saddle's string-spacing.

With its solid soundboard, the RPS-9 has a bit more of an open sound as well as greater clarity. I play Magic Sam's "Looking Good," which, while more of an electric blues piece, reveals an upside of these Recording Kings: they're good transitional acoustic guitars for electric players. The response and feel are similar to that of an unplugged electric guitar. Of course, you get more volume on these guitars than you would using an electric, but the Recording Kings are loud enough to get the point across.

The RPS-7 and the RPS-9 might not have lots of tonal complexity, but you wouldn't expect that from such affordable guitars. They're great for exploring musical ideas on a whim, and you don't have to handle them with kid gloves. Throw them in the back of the car and get to some picking!

AC

RECORDING KING DIRTY 30'S RPS-7 AND RPS-9

BODY 12-fret 0 size; spruce top with Cross Lap (X) bracing (RPS-7); solid Sitka spruce top with Cross Lap (X) bracing (RPS-9); whitewood back and sides; Revebond bridge with 2-1/8" string spacing; satin Tobacco Sunburst finish (RPS-7 also available in Matte Black or Tobacco Sunburst with Golden Strings decal)

NECK Nato neck; Revebond fretboard; 25.4" scale length; 1-11/16" bone nut; closed-gear tuners with ivory colored plastic buttons; satin finish

EXTRAS D'Addario EJ16 Phosphor Bronze Light Strings (.012–.053); optional Recording King gigbag (\$49.99 street) or Guardian hardshell case (\$89.99 street)

PRICE \$149 street (RPS-7)/\$199 street (RPS-9)

Made in China, recordingking.com

Trace Elliot Transit-A Acoustic

A smart new preamp and effects unit for gigging guitarists

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

I'm admittedly somewhat of a neophyte when it comes to digital effects. So I was a little nonplussed when I was greeted with a series of green and red lights when I turned on Trace Elliot's Transit-A acoustic preamp and effects unit. But I'm surprised to find that I don't even need to consult the manual to figure out the Transit-A, which is so intuitive to use. And, though I tend to avoid effects, I'm struck by how inspiring they sound on this unit. The Transit A is part of Trace Elliot's new Acoustic sub-brand and is tailored specifically for the acoustic guitarist.

SMALL AND FLEXIBLE

Gigging acoustic guitarists are so often at the mercy of the house system at a given venue, and it can be difficult to get a consistently good sound. Trace, the UK-based amp company now owned by Peavey—clearly recognized this conundrum in designing the Transit-A. It has practically everything an acoustic guitarist needs before going into a PA system, in a compact unit (12.3 inches wide by 4.5 deep by 2.3 high) that weighs around 2.5 pounds.

The Transit-A has a clean and orderly layout. Starting at the control panel's upper-right corner, a series of knobs is arranged right to left—the opposite of most amp controls, but logical enough. First there are controls that shape the basic sound—gain, boost, treble, mid, bass, and notch—and then there are knobs for adjusting the chorus, delay, and reverb effects. Meanwhile, a series of foot-switches are used for turning on the effects, and for setting the delay's tap tempo.

On the Transit-A's rear panel are inputs and outputs that offer plenty of flexibility. There's a quarter-inch input, for guitar, and an auxiliary eighth-inch input, which allows you to play along with tracks from a smartphone or tablet. The outputs include a quarter-inch dry out; a pair of quarter-inch outs for mono or stereo sound; and a pair of XLR outs, one that's not affected by the knobs and one that reflects everything but the unit's output level.



PLUG IN AND PLAY

I plugged a Breedlove Premier Concerto into the Transit-A and fed it to an AER Compact 60/3 combo. First, I try the Transit-A's onboard tuner, which is engaged when the reverb footswitch is depressed, muting the output. When a string is in tune, a circle around the notch knob is illuminated in red instead of the expected green, but it's easy enough to read.

The Transit-A is designed to work with any type of acoustic pickup. A piezo button on the unit gives 10dB of boost, handy for a guitar without a built-in preamp; a pre-shape button boosts the low and high frequencies while attenuating the mids, which should help inexpensive pickups sound more natural.

Though the low, mid, and high controls—which provide an active +/-15dB boost/cut—have a good sweep, I get a great sound with the controls set on neutral. I do, however, miss the knobs having a center detent to let me know that the EQ is off. It's satisfying to tweak the boost and gain controls to achieve a slightly gritty sound that's ideal for single-note soloing with a band.

What works really well for me (though perhaps not for a diehard sonic tinkerer) is that the reverb and chorus effects each have just one control—for blending the level of wet and dry signals. I liked the immediacy of this setup and avoiding having to tweak a bunch of parameters.

On the other hand, the delay is controllable in terms of tempo (handily shown with a flashing blue light at the tap-tempo foot-switch) and amount of repeats, and this has its obvious advantages: It's easy to create a

delay sound on the fly with the appropriate rhythmic activity for a given tune. What's more, the delay has a warm and natural sound, as do the chorus and reverb. And these effects can be used individually or simultaneously for a broad sonic palette.

Any gigging musician is all too familiar with not knowing what to expect in terms of sound at a new venue. Things can get hairy out there. It's possible to negate this dilemma with Trace Acoustic's Transit-A—kind of a sonic Swiss Army knife for the acoustic-electric guitarist, which will help you get a consistently good sound no matter where you play. **AG**

TRACE ACOUSTIC TRANSIT-A

FEATURES Three-band EQ; chorus, reverb, and delay; phase reverse; notch filter; boost and gain; chromatic tuner

INPUTS 1/4" instrument; 1/8" auxiliary

OUTPUTS Two 1/4" out (Mono and Stereo); 1/4" dry; 1/8" headphones out; XLR Pre and Post outs with ground lift

EXTRAS 9-volt DC power supply; nylon carrying case

PRICE \$399.99 MSRP/\$300 street

Made in China, traceelliot.com



Blind Lemon
Jefferson



Maybelle
Carter

Digging Deep for American Roots

This comprehensive anthology of '20s and '30s recordings is much more than a history lesson

BY BLAIR JACKSON

The word “epic” has been degraded through overuse in recent years, but here’s a new box set that truly merits that adjective. This is more than just the soundtrack for the brilliant three-part PBS documentary series *American Epic*—about the rise and spread of American vernacular (or what we now lump under “roots”) music in the late ’20s and early ’30s.

This comprehensive five-disc, 100-song treasury is one of the most important compilations of its kind ever released—perhaps since Harry Smith’s seminal *Anthology of American Folk Music* in 1952, which collected 84 songs on six LPs from (roughly) the same period, and which through the years affected untold numbers of folk, blues, country, and rock musicians who got their first exposure to non-mainstream regional American music before it was widely transformed by the rise of radio and the record industry outside of cities. *American Epic* actually covers more stylistic ground than the Smith anthology, adding Hawaiian, Cajun, Tex-Mex, Native American, and other indigenous forms to the basic staples of blues, old-time folk, early country, jug band, gospel, and more that it shares with the *Anthology*. (The two releases share just seven tracks between them.)

For lovers and players of acoustic guitar,



Various Artists

American Epic: The Collection

(Sony/Columbia Legacy)

American Epic offers an incredibly rich and varied sampling of styles and approaches to the instrument. (By my count, guitar appears on 73 songs.) There’s a fair amount of rhythmic support strumming—sometimes in competition with more prominent (or audible) fiddle or

banjo—but also, song after song of soulful and at times virtuosic fingerpicking and slide work that still astonishes 90 years later. As you might expect, many of the best-known blues and country players of that era are represented—Blind Blake, Maybelle Carter, Mississippi John Hurt, Son House, Jimmie Rodgers, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson, Son House, et al. But for every “name,” there’s an equally compelling (relative) unknown: Julius Daniels, Mattie Delaney, Roosevelt Graves, Hawaiian slide ace Sol Ho’opi’i, William Moore, Gutty Cardenas y Lencho, and so many others.

Lovingly curated by the director of the documentary series, Bernard MacMahon, the small, square, book-format box also includes a fascinating essay about the music, the era it came from, how the recordings were originally made and later restored, plus personnel and complete lyrics for every song, copious photos, and quotes accompanying each song, either from the artist or someone who had seen them perform. It’s a marvelous history lesson, but even more, it’s a glimpse into the very heart of America, as emotionally relevant today as it was nearly a century ago. Times and circumstances change. People don’t.

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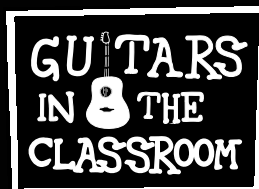


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PLAYLIST



James Elkington

Wintres Woma

Paradise of Bachelors

English guitarist's debut is full of magic and mystery

Magic is afoot in James Elkington's debut solo album *Wintres Woma*. The collection, which takes its title from the Old English for "the sound of winter," tethers Elkington's mystic yet matter-of-fact worldview to labyrinthine guitar lines as strong and supple as a serpent's spine.

The Chicago-based English guitarist draws on his previous collaborations with Richard Thompson, Jeff Tweedy, and Nathan Salsburg, and goes one step beyond. Here, the time-signature-slipping arrangements are more playful, and the melodies shuffle through jazz, British folk, and chamber pop.

Elkington's rippling picking emerges from the mist on "Wading the Vapors," a fogbound journey recast as a lucid dream, where Tomeka Reid's cello groans like an unseen beast. Harmonics ping like sonar over slack and slippery lap steel on "Grief Is Not Coming," which equates the title emotion with an anticipated squall.

On "When I Am Slow," Elkington questions the "the trembling joists" that support the doors of perception. Dissonant bent notes and vertiginous arpeggios underline the tune's groggy unease. The theme of reality as a funhouse mirror is reinforced in "The Parting Glass," a somersaulting instrumental where Elkington's guitar tone slides between harpsichord, hammered dulcimer, and a music box winding down.

Elkington's guitar snakes through *Wintres Woma* like streams of ectoplasm in an old spirit photo. Those pictures of mediums summoning the invisible world were undoubtedly faked. Elkington's magical mystery tour is the real deal.

—Pat Moran



Allison Pierce

Year of the Rabbit

(Sony Masterworks)

One-half of the Pierces steps out with deeply felt solo album

On her debut solo album after many years of performing and recording with her sister Catherine in the Pierces, Allison Pierce veers sharply from the atmospheric alt-pop of the duo's 2014 *Creation* album in favor of a more natural, acoustic guitar-based country sound that, at its best, is somewhat reminiscent of Emmylou Harris' classic early work, though with Pierce's personality strongly shining through.

Year of the Rabbit is a close collaboration with the always tasteful producer/engineer Ethan Johns, who basically plays every instrument on the album save for Pierce's acoustic guitar, strings on two tracks played by Gabe Witcher, and one featuring the always impeccable Greg Leisz on pedal steel. Two decades of singing with her sister have given Pierce the confidence to handle her own harmonies and backing vocals on the album, and on "It Is Well with My Soul," to stack vocals a capella.

Most of the songs are simple, well-constructed tunes about the emotional pitfalls of relationships (her "sorry heart has a story to tell"), but she never comes off as overly self-pitying. Musically, nothing sounds forced; the arrangements in every case adroitly match the mood and thrust of the lyrics. And though no one is going to buy this to hear Pierce's acoustic guitar skills, it must be noted that she is a fine rhythm player, whose assured strumming is always in perfect sync with her deeply felt vocals. It's a beautifully made slice of autobiography.

—Blair Jackson

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1934 Gibson L-5

A pair of sought-after vintage archtops surfaces in Brooklyn

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It's not uncommon to find a prewar Gibson L-5 for sale, but it is uncommon for two from the same year to make a simultaneous appearance at the same shop. That's what makes these two 1934 Gibson L-5s, available at press time through Brooklyn's Retrofret for \$13,500 each, such a special sighting.

Lloyd Loar, a designer and acoustic engineer at Gibson, designed the first L-5 in 1924. Though it wasn't the first true archtop guitar, with its carved soundboard and f-holes, the Gibson L-5 became the blueprint for all subsequent archtops. It was the instrument of choice for musicians from jazz pioneer Eddie

Lang to country luminary Maybelle Carter.

Loar signed the paper labels on around 30 of the earliest L-5s, and while today these are most coveted, the 1934 model is a strong contender on the vintage market.

These two L-5s bear the serial numbers 91100 (left), and 1498-5 (right). Like the earliest examples, these L-5s have 16-inch lower bouts, which increased to 17 inches on the Advanced L-5s made from 1935 onwards. Though Gibson started using easier-to-install kerfed braces on the L-5 around 1929, curiously, #91100 has the earlier-style solid carved braces, a spec that some players find more responsive.

Overall, both of these L-5s are in excellent condition, though #91100 is missing its pickguard and mounting hardware and has received a replacement bridge. According to Retrofret's Scott Tsai, the necks both have fairly pronounced V shapes that feel quite similar. But to his ear their voices are contrasting: #1498-5 has a punchier and more cutting sound, ideal for ensemble playing, while #91100 has a warmer tone and greater sustain, making it a good choice for unaccompanied work.

For the (well-heeled) archtop enthusiast, either of these examples would make a dreamy and era-transporting companion. **AG**

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